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The American educational system has not been effective in educating African American children. This is evident in the disproportionate number of Black students functioning below grade level, held back in grades and suspended for minor infractions. There is an achievement gap between African American and White students. The problem of the achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts has existed for a long time. This study examined how teachers form expectations of African American students, focusing on whether they get to know their students directly or if they form conclusions based on knowledge from pop culture stereotypes.

For the purpose of this study I defined teacher expectations as inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achievement of their students based on what they know about these students. I defined popular culture as the meanings we construct from the images, languages, and formats of our day-to-day lives.

The theoretical framework of this research relies on the "Pygmalion Effect" or the self-fulfilling prophecy with the notion that expectations of an event can make it happen. The research questions for this study were: (a) What expectations do teachers have of their African American students? How are these expectations formed?; (b) How are these expectations associated with

what the teachers feel they know about the students from direct knowledge of particular students, or from more generalized knowledge about particular types of students, especially as gleaned from stereotypes and other messages in popular culture?; and (c) What is the relative impact of pop culture and stereotypes, versus direct knowledge, on teachers' actions and interactions with students?

The methodology of this study utilized a limited case study design. Data collection methods included interviews, classroom observations, and focus groups. The participants were 12 classroom teachers and two elementary school principals. The interview and focus group questions included questions focused on the participants' expectations of their students as well as their views on how African Americans are portrayed in popular culture.

The findings in this study demonstrated that teachers who rely on popular culture based information about African Americans tend to have lower expectations of their students. The teachers who got to know their students as individuals had higher expectations of their students.

THE ROLE OF POP CULTURE BASED INFORMATION AND
STEREOTYPES VERSUS DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF
INDIVIDUALS IN FORMING TEACHER
EXPECTATIONS OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

Doris A. Brown

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Approved by

Dr. Carolyn Riehl
Committee Chair

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my sisters, Edna Mark and Linda Blackmon, and my aunt, Rosa McKoy, who checked on me every weekend and encouraged me to keep working when I was ready to give up.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Dr. Carolyn Riehl

Committee Members Dr. Joanne Chesley

Dr. Larry Coble

Dr. Kathleen Casey

June 23, 2006
Date of Acceptance by Committee

June 23, 2006
Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about how teachers form expectations of African American students, focusing on whether they get to know children directly or if they form conclusions based on knowledge from pop culture stereotypes. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What expectations do teachers have of their African American students? How are these expectations formed?
2. How are these expectations associated with what the teachers feel they know about the students from direct knowledge of particular students, or from more generalized knowledge about particular types of students, especially as gleaned from stereotypes and other messages in popular culture?
3. What is the relative impact of pop culture and stereotypes, versus direct knowledge, on teachers' actions and interactions with students?

As I prepared for this research I reviewed relevant literature on teacher expectations of African American students, racism, stereotypes and popular culture.

Problem

The American educational system has not been effective in educating African American children. This is evident in the disproportionate number of Black students functioning below grade level, held back in grades and suspended for minor infractions. The problem of the achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts has existed for a long time. Hale's (1982) narrative case studies in "Black Children" shows how the system is not working because of the number of African American children dropping out or being "pushed out" of our schools. As stated by Perry, Steele, & Hilliard (2003):

The contemporary conversation about the achievement gap can be characterized as follows: On whatever measure one uses from the SAT to the Stanford Nine, in school districts and schools across the country, irrespective of political orientation, demographic characteristics, or per-pupil spending; there exists a gap between the academic performance of Black and Latino students on one hand and White and Asian students on the other. This gap exists even between Black and White children who ostensibly come from similar social-class backgrounds and who attend the same schools. (p. 7)

While speaking to an audience at Howard University, Dr. Ronald Ferguson (2000) suggested that since the late 1980s, scholars have sought answers and solutions to improving African American student performance at all grade levels from kindergarten through graduate school. Since that time, the achievement gap continues to exist, and it is still common to have a disproportionate number of African American students in low academic classes and "slow" groups. In spite of

the attempt of policy makers at the state and federal levels to draw attention to the gaps through mandates such as the “No Child Left Behind Legislation,” the problem remains. For example, the 2004 SAT results in Guilford County revealed a 234 point gap in the scores between Black and White students. Although most educators are aware of the gaps, I don’t feel that enough has been done to help alleviate this problem.

Cross (1996) suggests that stereotypical images of African Americans are embedded in schools that perpetuate inferior abilities of African Americans. In spite of these findings, many African Americans are successful in school (Billingsley, 1992). But, I cannot help but feel concerned when almost every child I see pulled out for remediation or the resource room is African American or when the children being sent to principal’s office for inappropriate behavior are almost always African American youth, and when the lowest performers are typically children of color.

Often times, many educators begin to expect their African American students to have learning problems or end up in the principal’s office. Teacher expectations can play a major role in student success; what a teacher expects can determine how the teacher interacts with the student which can ultimately affect the student’s achievement. When considering how teachers form their expectations, there is some evidence that they do so on the basis of labels and stereotypes. Expectations are expressed in the actions of the teachers as well as the teacher’s words (Clarken, 1995). Good (1987) conducted research on how

teachers form expectations. He found that teachers form expectations of and assign labels to people based upon such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, attractiveness, dialect, and socioeconomic level. Good (1987) suggested that once we label a person, it can affect how we act and react toward that person. Taylor (2000) demonstrated through a study on how teachers viewed the African American students in their classes that at times teachers lower their expectations for this group of individuals. Using a checklist and surveys, the participants in the study were asked to reflect on their practice and answer questions about the students they served. A teacher who participated in the study admitted that she expected less from the African American students, although she was not aware of this fact until the end of the study. This acknowledgement was rare in that most educators shy away from admitting that they may be biased in any areas.

Williams and Whitehead (1971) conducted a study in which they used a hidden camera to tape student responses to several questions. The students were from different ethnic backgrounds and spoke with different dialects. The tapes were later shown to a group of teachers who had to predict the students' classroom performance based on what they saw on the tapes. Using the following criteria, the children were ranked:

(Confidence-Eagerness)
THE CHILD SEEMS: unsure-confident
THE CHILD IS: passive-active
THE CHILD SEEMS: reticent-eager to speak
THE CHILD SEEMS: hesitant-enthusiastic

THE CHILD SEEMS TO: dislike-like talking

(Ethnicity-Nonstandardness)

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHILD'S HOME IS PROBABLY:

Marked ethnic-standard style

THE CHILD SOUNDS: non-Ango-like-Anglo-like

THE CHILD'S HOME LIFE IS PROBABLY: unlike-like yours

THE CHILD'S FAMILY IS PROBABLY: low-high social status

THE CHILD SEEMS CULTURALLY: disadvantaged-advantaged (p. 266)

Williams and Whitehead found that teachers' evaluation of stereotypes of particular ethnic groups tended to be related to their ratings of children belonging to that particular group. Thus a teacher, rating a stereotypical Anglo example as relatively high on the confidence-eagerness scale the researcher developed or low in ethnicity-non standardness, tended to rate the videotaped child from that group accordingly. Thus, teachers may evaluate individual children relative to their stereotypes for particular groups. Rosenthal (1973) addressed the question of whether teachers stereotype students of different ethnic and class backgrounds, using actual classroom evaluative criteria and audio, visual, and audiovisual cues to elicit teacher stereotypes. Teachers were presented with audio, visual, and audiovisual materials portraying students from different ethnic and social-class groups and were asked to evaluate the students using a semantic-differential scale. Rosenfeld discovered that teachers do stereotype students on the basis of ethnic and class cues, and that these cues are transmitted through both audio and visual modes, the former providing more information for making judgments.

Many researchers (Rosenfeld, 1973; Shavelson, 1983) have determined that teachers do judge their students on a variety of characteristics. Varner (1922, 1923) assumed that teacher estimates, or judgments, of students' intelligence were inaccurate. He said that teachers tended to be influenced by traits other than intelligence in rating the abilities of their students. His examples included the students' personalities and appearances. Pugh (1974) found that both male and female teachers judged the academic ability or school behavior of White students more favorably than those of black students, even when the students were matched for social class and background.

More than 90% of classroom teachers in the country are White (National Education Association, 1997) and increasingly they are teaching children from racial, cultural, and class backgrounds different from their own (Johnson, 2002). Many of these teachers only have contact with their students in the classroom, with little knowledge of the children's backgrounds. Oftentimes, their knowledge of African American youngsters comes from old stereotypes and what they get from television and the media. As stated by Delpit (1995), if teachers do not have some knowledge of their children's lives outside of the realms of the classroom, then they cannot know their students' strengths. This results in teachers "teaching down," or "dumbing down" the curriculum. Kuykendall (2004) suggests that teacher attitudes do have consequences. Once teachers develop low expectations and the accompanying negative behavior, they send signals to

students that suggest the student is not capable of success in a given subject area.

Hale-Benson (1982) suggests that formal education has not worked for many African American youngsters because it has not employed the teaching styles that correspond with students' learning styles. Hale-Benson (1986) further argues that Black students have barely mastered the norms of their own culture when they are confronted with teaching styles that are incompatible with their accepted learning patterns. Ladson-Billings' (1994) research on successful teachers of African American children found that there is a consensus around how such teachers conceptualize themselves and others (i.e., students, parents, community members), how they conceptualize social relations (both within and outside of the school and classroom), and how they conceptualize knowledge. Teachers who can conceptualize themselves (understand who they are and their place in society), and others are more prone to see students as individuals instead of representatives of their ethnic group. Garcia and Asención's (2001) work suggests that Latino students benefit from teachers who specify task outcomes and what students must do to accomplish tasks competently, communicate both high expectations and a sense of efficacy about their own ability to teach, exhibit a use of active teaching, communicate clearly, obtain and maintain student's engagement, monitor students' progress and provide immediate feedback.

In a narrative study of homeless African American men, Herbert Kohl (1991) found that many intercity teachers viewed their six year old African American boys as the 16 year old teenagers in handcuffs they had seen on the six o'clock news. Ladson-Billings (1994) discovered in a study that when teachers expected African American students to be harder to control the teachers worked harder to control them. This theory plays out in the teacher's classroom who lines her students' desks in rows before meeting them, assuming that because the students are predominately African American they won't be able to collaborate and work in groups. When I was a principal I became very wary of these teachers because often times, their students spent a considerable amount of time in my office.

In Guilford County, North Carolina, there is a learning gap between African American students and their White counterparts. The overall achievement rates of African American students in elementary, middle and high school fall far behind the scores of their White peers as demonstrated in Table 1.

The achievement scores presented in Table 2 (see page 10) might suggest that there is a problem in educating our African American students in Guilford County. National data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) also show gaps in the scores between African American and White students. For example, the 2004 state reading scores of students age 9, 13, and 17 show a 26 point gap. There is some reason to believe that part of the problem is low teacher expectations for African American students.

I became interested in teacher expectations of African American students when I was a beginning teacher and heard a teacher state that she was

Table 1

2002-2003 Data (Guilford County High Schools Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity)

	African American	White
Number of students who took the *AP Test	1014	4129
Percentage of students who passed the *AP Test	16	57
Number of students who received *IB Diploma	1	37
Number of National Merit Scholars	0	12
Average score of students taking SAT	837	1071
Number of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school	382	196

*AP=Advanced Placement; IB=International Baccalaureate

surprised to have a “Black boy in the top reading group.” I grew up with the belief that because of the color of my skin, I had to work twice as hard to prove to the world that I did not fit into the stereotypes of the people in my race. My mother often told me stories about what “the world” thought about Blacks and she cringed whenever negative images of African Americans were flashed across our television screen. There was a belief in the African American community in which

Table 2***Percentage Point Gap on End of Grade Test (2003-2004 Data)***

Grade Level and Subject	Percentage Point Gap
Third Grade Reading	18.4
Fourth Grade Reading	19.1
Fifth Grade Reading	13.3
Sixth Grade Reading	23.2
Seventh Grade Reading	16.8
Eighth Grade Reading	14.4
Third Grade Math	18.1
Fourth Grade Math	6.3
Fifth Grade Math	9.3
Sixth Grade Math	14.4
Seventh Grade Math	20.9
Eighth Grade Math	22.3

I grew up that if one African American “messed up,” we had all messed up, because we were judged by the image of that particular one. I have two nephews who were educated in a public school system during the height of the “baggy pants and gansta rap” wave. One nephew never wore the baggy pants, and he conformed easily to the school culture. He was a good student, easily

motivated and always eager to learn. The teachers loved him, and he excelled nicely. The other nephew, on the other hand, wore the baggy pants, listened to the rap music and was inundated by the pop culture. Although he was extremely bright, he never made the grades the first nephew made. He was constantly in trouble, and he always felt that his teachers did not like him. Once when he got suspended, he swore that he had not done anything that had not been done by others in his class. To this day, he says that he was suspended for asking the teacher why she was being so hard on him.

In this dissertation, I studied the sources and consequences of teacher expectations of African American students. In the next chapter, I will review the relevant literature in more detail.

CHAPTER II

PRIOR RESEARCH ON POPULAR CULTURE, STEREOTYPES, AND EXPECTATIONS

There is a problem with educating African American children in our society. In order to help answer the questions for this study, I will review literature on the following topics: stereotypes, prejudice, and racism in American culture and history, especially regarding African Americans; evidence of stereotypes, prejudice, racism in education, especially regarding African American students and especially in terms of teacher expectations; theoretical perspectives and research on the general nature of expectations and teacher expectations; theoretical perspectives on the nature of prejudice and use of stereotypes as sources for expectations; and popular culture and its role in stereotypes and prejudice and racism.

Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Racism in American Culture and History

African Americans did not come to America for a better way of life. They did not dock at Ellis Island in order to live the "American Dream." Woodson (1915) described the conditions under which black people came to America. They were brought over to provide working labor for the new society. Upon their first arrival, slaves were viewed as animals that were incapable of learning. Many slave owners and traders were afraid that educating slaves would make them

wise enough to escape. When examining the educational history of African Americans from slavery to the present day, the focus was and remains on learning to read and write (Hooks, 2003a). As stated by Woodson (1915), it was believed that the more slave owners cultivated the minds of slaves the more unserviceable they made them. Hale (1982) concurred that the American slavery experience that converted the African into a Negro caused many problems. The newly arrived Africans were prohibited from using their native language and were forced to adopt the English language along with its view of the world. Everything that was real to this ethnic group was discounted and determined to be valueless by the people with the power. W. E. B. DuBouis (1961) often wrote about the confusion of the African American plight. In "The Souls of Black Folk," he described the African American people as possessing two "warring souls."

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world . . . One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 9)

Negative attitudes toward African Americans or racism started when Africans were captured like animals and brought to this country. Sue (2003) defines racism as any attitude, action, or institutional structure or any social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their color. "It is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination because it involves the power to

carry out the systematic discriminatory practices and continuing manner“ (p. 31).

Collins (2004a) refers to a new racism that was created in the social movements of the past fifty years. She stated:

The end of colonialism and dismantling of racial apartheid within the United States and in South Africa signaled the possibilities for antiracist, democratic societies in which Blackness would no longer serve as a badge of inferiority. Yet the actual social conditions that confront this global cohort and their responses to it have turned out to be quite different. (p. 53)

Collins illustrates that the new racism is transnational. She said:

One can now have racial inequality that does not appear to be regulated by the state to the same degree. For example, the legal support given racial segregation in the United States has been abandoned yet African Americans remain disproportionately at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The new racism relies more heavily on the manipulation of ideas within mass media. (p. 54)

At an academic institution, Richard Lapchick (2000) asked members of the audience that he was addressing to write down five words they would use to describe American athletes. In addition to believing that most athletes in the U. S. are African American and listing positive adjectives, they also included the words; dumb, violent, rapist or drug user. Lapchick conducted a further study and had the following findings:

- 56 percent of Whites think African Americans are violent
- 62 percent of Whites think African Americans are not as hard working as Whites

- 77 percent of Whites think most African Americans live off welfare
- 53 percent of Whites think African Americans are less intelligent

Often times the images of African Americans that flash across the television screen can create stereotypes and preconceived notions that some educators might have about the students they serve. The “gangsta rap” rave did not help the perception of African American males. Since many teachers only have contact with African American students in their classrooms, they often times form their views on what they see in the media. Hooks (2003a) said that this can cause the teachers to lower their standards in order to teach these “backward students.” Ferguson (2001) uses the rap song, “don’t believe the hype” to express how a young African American male might feel when he is misunderstood. The following lines paint a picture of a person who is judged by the way he looks:

The minute they see me, fear me
 I’m the epitome-a public enemy
 Used, abused, without clues
 I refused to blow a fuse
 They even had it on the news
 Don’t believe the hype
 Don’t believe the hype

-PUBLIC ENEMY, “don’t believe the hype”

Stables revealed in his autobiography, “Parallel Time” (1994) that when he was enrolled at the University of Chicago, he noticed that although he was dressed as a typical college student on and off campus that being an African

American man caused people to avoid him. He said that while shopping, he always had the security guards following him throughout the store. Steele (2003) argues that since everyone in our environment knows such stereotypes that it could influence how one is judged and treated.

Evidence of Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Racism in Education

Meier (2002) suggests that no school in America can avoid the issue of racism. Lee (2004) contends that whiteness remains the ubiquitous norm against which students of color are judged. Steele (2003) refers to the notion of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype as the “stereotype threat.” He said that everyone experiences stereotype threats where we might feel mistrustful and apprehensive. In a study designed to test whether the stereotype threat that African American students might experience when taking a test could affect their performance, Steele administered a difficult section of a Graduate Record Exam to White and Black students. The test was designed to be difficult enough for all students to feel frustrated. To make the Black students at risk of confirming the negative stereotype threat of their intelligent abilities, the test administrators told them that the test was measuring their verbal abilities. Steele found that the African American students scored a full deviation lower than the White students when they were told that the test was diagnostic of their ability. Steele and his partners administered a second test without giving any directions or making any comments. The scores of the nondiagnostic test showed no significant differences. Steele concluded:

In the stereotype threat conditions of the experiments in this series, we merely mentioned to participants that the test was a measure of verbal ability. This was enough, we felt, to make the negative stereotype about African Americans' abilities relevant to their performance on the test, and thus to put them at risk of confirming, or being seen to confirm, the negative stereotype about their abilities. If the pressure imposed by the relevance of a negative stereotype about one's group is enough to impair an important intellectual performance, then Black participants should perform worse than whites in the "diagnostic" conditions of this experiment but not in the "nondiagnostic" condition. (p. 114)

Because many White teachers lack knowledge of Black people, African American students face negative cultural stereotypes that portray members of their ethnic group as less intelligent than European American students (Steele, 1997). Aronson (2004) discovered that the results from opinion polls show that stereotypes are widely believed. Taylor (1999) feels that certain actions in schools help create negative stereotypes of African American males. For example he stated that although fewer than 2000 African American males are in the NBA compared to the 30,000 African American physicians, the children are exposed to more images of sports figures than doctors. He stated:

Schools in the United States are also saturated with images of black athlete stereotypes. The reinforcement of physical ability over intellectual capability diminishes the potential of young black men, but it also perpetuates the myth that the road to success is paved with sports contracts, not diplomas. (p. 1)

In predominantly low-income and African American schools, teachers tend to have lower expectations for their students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). This tends to be true also in schools where the African American students

are from the same socioeconomic background, as Taylor (2002) demonstrated through studying how teachers view the African American students in their classrooms that teachers at times lower their expectations of Black children. Many teachers judge their students by making assumptions about what they can do based on stereotypes (Delpit, 1995). Delpit argues that our society nurtures and maintains stereotypes. A teacher with limited knowledge of African Americans could expect much less from this subgroup of students. If teachers look out at their classroom and see the sons and daughters of slaves, how does that vision translate into her expectations for educational excellence? Ladson-Billings (1994) raises the question of how can teachers who see African American students as mere descendants of slaves be expected to inspire them to educational, economic and social levels that may even exceed their own? Although many teachers are influenced by what they see or hear about their African American students, some teachers look beyond the surface. Kuykendall (2004) shared a different story about her experiences with her teachers. She recalled:

I consider myself very fortunate. I was educated in poor neighborhoods on the west and south sides of Chicago by teachers willing to do whatever was necessary to bring out the best in this poor Black girl.

I was especially fortunate to have teachers who were patient, committed, and encouraging. Despite a very slow start, caring and nurturing educators convinced me that I was quite capable of academic and life-long success. I am eternally grateful to those teachers who took the time to mold and motivate me. (p. 23)

Few research studies have examined how White teachers conceptualize race (their own and those of their students) and how their views about race may influence their classroom practice (Johnson, 2002). Schofield (1986) in a qualitative study of a desegregated middle school found that teachers claimed not to see color in their students and consequently ignored discriminatory institutional practices toward students of color such as higher suspension rates for African American males. Obidah and Teel (2001) found nothing unusual about the fact that most of her African American students were in the lowest level classes when she first started teaching. It was during this period that she did not see color. Sullivan (1979) said that for teachers to provide an effective education for culturally diverse students, it is necessary for them to become culturally competent. In order for teachers to be culturally competent they must demonstrate knowledge of the history of minority populations, societal racism, language, affirmation of minority students, multicultural education and the role of the community and family. Boykin (1994) suggested that educators who understand the cultural beliefs, values, norms and traditions of their students are able to recognize and affirm diverse cultural styles of learning, which in turn, impacts their teaching and communication with students and families. In a study to determine what teachers expect of minority students, Deborah Harmon (2002) found that culturally competent teachers are comfortable with the differences between themselves and their students.

Brophy and Good (1974) demonstrated that teachers do not treat students in their classes the same, and that their actions are based on their perceptions of individual students. Once aware of their own negative reactions toward students of other cultures, culturally competent teachers strive to become non judgmental. As stated by Allport (1954), teachers can reduce their prejudice toward other racial groups and begin to develop multiethnic competencies by engaging in cooperative endeavors with individuals and communities of color in meaningful relationships. Farkas (2003) believes that researchers, policy makers and school administrators should monitor the attitudes and behaviors of teachers. He said that many seem to believe that this effort would cause a counterproductive backlash among many teachers. This is due in part to the fact that teachers at times are not aware of their attitudes, or they ignore their feelings. It is often common practice for schools to overlook the subtle signs of racism. Kuykendall (2004) feels that we must not ignore racism in our schools.

It can be subtle, but it is pervasive. Its very existence can encourage teacher behavior and organizational norms that serve only to reinforce low motivation, underachievement, and poor school and life success in many Black and Hispanic youth.

Often difficult to recognize, institutional racism can be covert, indirect, and sometimes unconscious. The origins of institutional racism are in our most established and respected institutional norms, societal values, and beliefs. This prejudice against groups of people is based on the belief that members of some racial groups are better and therefore more deserving than others. (p. 49)

In a study of how single African American mothers felt about the negative impact that teacher bias had on their children, Cooper (2003) found that the mothers were critical of the public school teachers' interaction with their children. Several participants felt that the teachers did not take the time to "uncover the potential of students who they think misbehave or are not high achievers" (p. 112). Many of the mothers felt that the teachers did not care because of their racial biases.

Theoretical Perspectives and Research on the General Nature of Expectations and Teacher Expectations

Robert K. Merton (1948) coined the phrase, "self fulfilling prophecy." He believed Thomas' famous adage that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1928, p. 257). Tauber (1997) defined Merton's self fulfilling prophecy theory as follows as it relates to teaching and learning:

- a. The teacher forms the expectations.
- b. Based on these expectations, the teacher acts in a differential manner.
- c. The teacher's treatment tells each student (loud and clear) what behavior and what achievement the teacher expects.
- d. If this achievement is consistent, it will conform more and more closely to that expected of him or her.
- e. With time, the student's behavior and achievement will conform more and more closely to that expected of him or her. (p. 19)

In education, the self-fulfilling prophecy was first dubbed the "Pygmalion Effect" (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The Pygmalion Effect or the self-fulfilling prophecy can be defined as the notion that expectations of an event can make it

happen. Field (1989) states that it starts with a false belief causing new behavior which makes the false belief become a true positive reality. For example, when a teacher conveys to a student that she is capable long enough, or consistently enough, the student will begin to believe she can and will perform as the teacher expects (Field, 1989). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) conducted a study in which they tested elementary children using a test they called the “Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition.” They told the teachers that based on the results from that test, they could predict that certain children would demonstrate intellectual “blooming” or “spurting” during the year. The “spurters” were a random sample of 20 percent of the children in the school. All students were tested with the same IQ test after one semester, one year, and two academic years. Gains in IQ from the pretest to the first year retest were computed and “expectancy advantage” was determined by the degree to which IQ gains by experimental children exceeded the gains by the control group. A significant expectancy advantage was found, particularly among children in the first and second grades.

Lane, Wehby, and Cooley (2006) dismissed the possibility that teacher expectations might be a factor in determining the success of students. In contrast, Goldenberg (1992) studied two first grade Hispanic girls in the same classroom and found that the child for whom the teacher held low expectations in reading did well and the student for whom the teacher held high expectations did poorly. Goldberg stated that “these paradoxical effects are understandable if we consider what the teacher thought and did in a broader context, that is, her

overall view of each child and her assessment of what was educationally necessary and appropriate for each” (p. 517). Research about the impact of expectations is inconsistent.

Teachers spend more time getting to know students for whom they have higher expectations (Adams & Cohen, 1974; Brophy & Good, 1974). These students are called on more frequently and given a greater opportunity to learn (Rosenthal, 1971). High achievers are reported to receive more opportunities to learn than low achievers (Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987). Thus, when teachers maintain high standards and high expectations for African American students, their chances of succeeding improve.

Teacher expectations have been defined as inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achievement of their students based on what they know about these students. The extent to which teacher expectations relate to the failure of African American students is uncertain (Good, 1987). In a study to determine whether teachers have the same expectations for all children, especially children of color and lower socioeconomic status, Warren (2002) found that approximately 25 percent of the teachers interviewed held high expectations for all children and had a high sense of teaching efficacy. Ethnicity and school SES did not have a meaningful impact on teacher belief.

Many teachers have difficulty separating a student's work from his or her ethnicity. They either expect poor work because of it or are surprised if it is good (Mitchell, 1990). It is not uncommon for many African American parents to hear

the comment, "You have a very smart African American boy!" These low expectations and negative beliefs about African American students come from mainstream society's invalidation of African American culture (Ladson-Billings & King, 1990). According to the assimilationist perspective, the teacher's role is to ensure that students fit into society. And if the teachers have low expectations, the teacher believes that the students are not important in our society (Ladson-Billings, 1994). What happens in a classroom and at school can make a big difference in the achievement of African American students. Taylor (1999) said:

Schools are the only institutions charged with extending the values of home and family into communities and society. They are the engine for freedom and democracy. Only in the classroom can children, regardless of their size, stature, race, gender or physical ability, be empowered by the vision that teachers instill. (p. 2)

As noted before, Ladson-Billings (1994) discovered that when teachers expect African American students to be harder to control, the teachers work harder to control them. The teacher's behavior not only tells the African American students what she believes about them, but she also tells all the other students in the class what they should believe about them. Often times, students who feel devalued in classrooms choose to disengage from learning. Psychological disengagement is the defensive detachment of self-esteem from a particular domain. In the academic arena, disengagement can result from devaluing academic success or discounting the validity of academic outcomes (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Deciding to actively not learn something involves

closing off part of oneself and limiting one's experience. It can require actively refusing to pay attention, acting dumb, scrambling one's thoughts and overriding curiosity (Kohl, 1991). There are many African American students in our schools who have refused to learn because of the low expectations set by their teachers. Teachers have a lot of power in the development of the youngsters they are assigned. "Educators who do not recognize the power they possess are likely to abuse it or fail to maximize it for their students' benefit" (Cooper, 2003, p. 104).

Popular Culture and Its Role in Stereotypes and Prejudice and Racism

Popular culture is a complex term (Williams, 1998). It is more than the delivery of information or advertising (Gause, 2005). "Culture is the meanings we construct from the images, languages, and formats of our day-to-day lives, the everyday forms of communication, art, and language that represent 'the people'" (Gause, 2001, p. 31). According to Gause (2005):

Popular culture is the very sea of our existence. In today's society, particularly U. S. society, we are bombarded on a 24-hour daily basis with mediated imagery and sound that shape our values, belief systems, and moral structures. The social institutions of our society-including families, public schools, and communities in which we live and work are affected and *infected*, as are those institutions engrossed in their own "traditions"-the legal, religious, and political communities. Because of the constant bombardment of "popular culture," how we and, particularly, present-day youth form our identities and cultural politics is influenced and based upon what is "popular." (p. 335)

Although popular culture is more than the information that is delivered to us from the media, it does encompass a wide variety of issues that are rooted in the

entertainment business (Cusic, 2001). In explaining the complexity of the term, Williams (1998) divides “culture” into three groups:

Ideal—Culture is a state or process of human perfection in terms of absolute or universal values.

Documentary—the body of intellectual and imaginative work in which human thought and experience are recorded .

Social—identifies cultures as a descriptive of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and “ordinary” behavior. (pp. 286-287)

Williams explains that each of the above components is represented in our analysis of the popular culture as it “relates to the expression of ideal universal human values, namely the desire and struggle for freedom from tyranny and oppression” (p. 287). Adorno and Horkheimer (1999) saw popular culture as a tool of the culture industries, used to sway people toward consumption and conformity.

There are many stereotypes in the media and in popular culture. Cortes (1995) argues that the media sometimes add to group understanding through sensitive examinations of ethnic experiences, cultures and problems, but it can also add to group misunderstanding through repeated presentation of derogatory stereotypes and overemphasis on negative themes. The media have been involved in the transmission of information that is sometimes correct and sometimes incorrect. Oftentimes, the media are also involved in classifying and disseminating values and beliefs (Hall, 1982). Television can interact with and affect personal identity; it can both challenge and reinforce stereotypes and

prejudice, and it can contribute to understanding and the misunderstanding of a group of people (Cortes, 1995).

Although the stereotypes of African Americans started when Blacks were enslaved, the media continues to perpetuate negative images and misinformation. From historical research, we know that African Americans have been portrayed in popular culture as inferior to whites and subservient to them. In both television programming and commercials, studies show that less than 10% of human appearance time includes non-whites (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). The black poor are portrayed negatively in the media. Gilens (2000) examined forty years of news stories on poverty. He found that 65 percent of the poor shown on network television news between 1988 and 1992 were African Americans. The weekly magazines offered the same view of the American poor with 62 percent of the poor people shown in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report* during these years as Black (Gilens, 2000). Although more African Americans were shown as being poor, the truth according to the U. S. Census Bureau is that only 29 percent of the poor people in American during this period were Black. According to Collins (2004) this might be due in part to how Blacks are portrayed in the media. She said:

In the 1990s Black popular culture became a hot commodity. Within the mass media influenced social relations, African American culture is now photographed, recorded, and/or digitalized, and it travels to all parts of the globe. (p. 122)

Gause (2005) explains that “popular culture is the background noise of our very existence” and that “the media has been the single most dominating force in shaping not only today’s global culture but also school culture” (p. 335). The level of media exposure has a great influence on our lives, and many researchers argue that it is very different from the values we claim to pursue in public education (Flores-Koulish, 2005; Gerbner, 1995; Giroux, 1994).

Gray (1995) gives a helpful overview of how blacks are depicted on television. He focuses on different periods of representation that reflect social dynamics: the 1950s stereotypical representations of blacks as happy and subservient, the 1960s as an era of black invisibility, the 1970s depiction of authentic black life, and the 1980s and 1990s with themes of social mobility and affluence. “Examination of blackness in films has tended to focus on the maintenance of stereotypical depictions related to violence and fear” (p. 265). Media, especially television, are a part of our everyday lives. “Racism, insidious in its manifestations, is frequently the subject of media spectacle that tends to fixate, frame, and fracture discourse about this vital issue” (Gaudelli, 2005, p. 262).

Through the literature examined, I learned that teacher expectations can lead to the success or failure of African American students. Based on previous theory and research on expectations, especially concerning self fulfilling prophecies, my conceptual framework is that some teachers get to know their students through direct knowledge while others might depend on pop culture-

based information and stereotypes. I have gathered data that will help me determine how teachers form expectations of their African American students, teacher expectations and the sources of those expectations, and how those expectations lead to student success or student failure based on the teacher's actions.

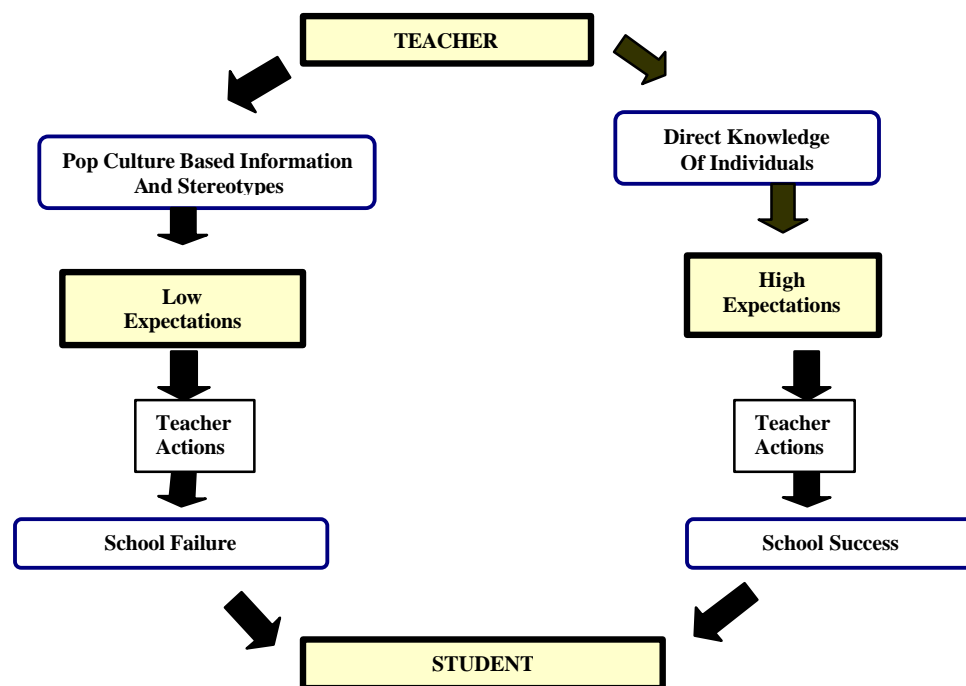


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

As stated above, I explored the question of how teacher expectations of African American students are associated with what the teachers feel they know about the students from direct knowledge of particular students, or from more generalized knowledge about particular types of students, especially as gleaned from stereotypes and other messages in popular culture. This study was an attempt to contribute to the limited knowledge on whether or not African American students are held to the same standards as their White peers or African American peers who are not viewed through the lens of negative stereotypes (Steele, 2003). Little research has been done in this area. I believe the knowledge developed from this study will help teachers better meet the needs of their African American students.

Research Approach

Because I wanted to understand the teachers' expectations of their students, I used a qualitative approach in this study. Shank and Villella (2004) described qualitative research as a lantern used to illuminate dark areas so that we can see. It was my hope that this study would shed light on the issue of how teachers form expectations of African American children. Riehl (2001) defined qualitative research as drawing a large net around any research that uses

methods to help researchers analyze data in ways to understand the world on its own terms. Maxwell (2004) suggested that qualitative research recognizes the reality and the importance of its meaning as well as the interpretive nature of our understanding of that reality. Schwandt (2001) contended that “qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. It is the life-world as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of study” (p. 84).

In choosing qualitative research over quantitative, I had to consider the characteristics of both. In quantitative research, data are usually presented in some numerical form and are then analyzed with statistical procedures; while in qualitative research, the data are words which are analyzed for their meanings and relationships. Qualitative research is interpretive; it provides an opportunity for people to talk about ideas and feelings in their own language, or to be observed by the researcher for their meanings and relationships. Using a qualitative research approach helped me construct a deeper understanding of the social actions and interactions occurring in the teachers’ classrooms (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). I did this through doing a field study that involved limited case studies of teachers, with data collected through interviews, observations, and focus groups.

A case study design is used to gain a clear understanding of a problem or situation (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1994) defines the case study research process as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its

real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident” (p. 13). Miles and Huberman (1994) think of a case study as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). They show a case study as a circle with a heart in the middle. The heart is the focus of the study, while the circle “defines the edge of the case: what will be studied” (p. 25). Teacher expectations are the heart of my study, and the edge is studying the thoughts and actions of teachers through interviews and observations in order to get at the heart of this study. Each teacher represented a distinct but limited case; together, the multiple cases provided a window on teacher expectations. The teachers were embedded in schools, and these factors were hard to separate. It was hard to study teachers without studying the schools in which they work. Additionally, case studies “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation” (Shaw, 1978, p. 21). In studying the schools along with the teacher participants in this study, I was able to take a holistic view of the situation. Using a case study design allowed me to get close to the participants. Bromley (1986) argues that case studies

. . . get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires), whereas experiments and surveys often use convenient data, e.g. test results, official records. Also, case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely, whereas experiments and surveys usually have a narrow focus. (p. 23)

Since case studies are often prevalent in the field of education (Merriam, 2001), this design was suitable for my study.

Research Settings and Participants

I interviewed 12 teachers embedded in two elementary school settings. In addition, I interviewed the principals of both schools. In selecting the schools, I decided to use schools with similar demographics but with different achievement results. Since I was studying how teachers form expectations of African American students, I had to find two predominately African American schools with similar demographics so that these factors could be ruled out of my results. I also wanted to find a high achieving African American school and a low performing school so that I could compare the actions of the teachers. School A (Mark Elementary) for example was 90% African American with 95% of its students receiving free lunch. This school had a 95% proficiency rate on the End of Grade tests. School B (Blackmon Elementary) was about 89% African American with a 95% free lunch rate. This school had a 69% proficiency rate on the End of Grade tests. I selected 6 teachers from the low performing school and 6 teachers from the high performing schools. I interviewed each teacher at least twice and most participants three times.

Schools

“Mark” Elementary School. In 2004, Mark Elementary School was recognized by the National Education Trust Fund as a school that “dispels the myth.” This honor was bestowed on schools that were predominately African

American and with a high poverty rate. Based on the many schools in the United States with these demographics, Mark should not have had a 98% proficiency rate as measured by the North Carolina End of Grade test (EOG) because the community was impoverished and the students had little or no support at home. In fact, during 2004, Mark Elementary had the highest proficiency rate in Guilford County. In spite of the high poverty among students, so high that the former principal used to spend her week nights delivering day old bread to families living in the government housing that surrounded the school, the students came to school almost every day (the principal walked to their home to “get” them when they were absent), and they left the school reading on grade level and performing well on state tests.

Mark had low teacher turnover. Many of the staff members had spent their entire careers at Mark. They were very dedicated and hard working. Like the former principal, they spent a lot of time in the neighborhood gathering students for special events at the school. They also took pride in the fact that their pupils did well, and they worked hard to establish relationships with the parents and the community as well. When communicating about the youngsters in their rooms, the teachers at Mark would say, “My children.” Throughout this study, I never heard them refer to their students in any other way. In all of my dealings with the teachers, I never heard them refer to Mark’s students as “at risk children.” These factors about the teachers at Mark also “dispelled the myth.” It was not uncommon for schools with Mark’s demographics to have high teacher turnover

rates. In many cases, veteran teachers were replaced with lateral entry or first year teachers who had a difficult time relating to children in general. In addition, it was not uncommon for teachers to refer to children in neighborhoods such as Mark as “our population” of students, or “these” or “those” children.

“Blackmon” Elementary School. Blackmon Elementary School was very similar to Mark Elementary demographically. One major difference was that Blackmon was not located in the middle of government housing. It was located in the rural southeast section of the county. Unlike Mark, Blackmon was an all White school until the early 1970s. It stayed predominately White until Greensboro City, Guilford County, and High Point City Schools merged in 1992. At that time, African American children were bused to the school. In addition to busing, the neighborhoods that surrounded Blackmon started becoming all Black neighborhoods. Although Blackmon had a low-income housing community, it didn’t serve an African American neighborhood.

There were a few teachers at Blackmon who began their careers at the school. It was typical to hear teachers at Blackmon complain about how their “population has changed” and how they used to have “good students.” Their complaints might be one of the reasons that there was a large teacher turnover rate. Each year the principal was forced to hire beginning teachers with little or no knowledge of teaching children who came to school needing support. In listening to the teachers talk about the students at Blackmon, one would never imagine that there were students from two-parent working class African American

families. In fact, at a leadership meeting, a teacher explained to her peers how difficult it was to teach the children at Blackmon because of their home lives.

Blackmon Elementary School's achievement scores were lower than the achievement scores at Mark Elementary.

Research Participants

I selected 6 teachers from each school above. In selecting the participants, I made sure that I had African American and White teachers. I interviewed teachers in grades K-5 (two times, five teachers three times), and each principal twice. I had a total of 14 people and 33 interviews (see appendix). The same 12 teachers participated in the focus group. I held two focus group meetings, one at Mark Elementary with the participants and one at Blackmon. I also observed in the teachers' classrooms.

During the first interview, I asked the interview questions outlined in the appendix. After the first interview, I conducted classroom observations and then followed up with a second and/or third interview based on what I observed in the rooms. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The observations lasted approximately two hours. In addition to the formal observations, I walked through the classrooms throughout this study.

Data Collection

I collected data on the teachers in my study through interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Table 3***Interview and Observation Dates and Times***

Teacher/Principal	Interview Date and Time	Observation Date and Time	2nd Interview Date and Time	3rd Interview Date and Time
Reid (Principal, Blackmon Elementary School)	1/17/2006 8:00 am	NA	3/22/2006 7:30 am	NA
Sanchez (Principal, Mark Elementary School)	1/17/2006 4:20 pm	NA	2/16/2006 8:15 am	NA
May	1/18/2006 10:00 am	1/19/2006 8:00 am	2/1/2006 7:30 am	3/13/2006 7:30 am
Michelangelo	1/18/2006 2:30 pm	1/19/2006 1:30 pm	2/1/2006 10:00 am	2/16/2006 3:00 pm
Michaels	1/19/2006 4:30 pm	1/19/2006 10:00 am	2/2/2006 4:00 pm	NA
Mitchell	1/19/2006 3:15 pm	1/20/2006 8:00 am	2/3/2006 3:00 pm	4/4/2006 10:00 am
Montgomery	Telephone interview, 1/23/2006 7:00 p.m.	1/19/2006 11:30 am	2/2/2006 9:00 am	4/18/2006 8:00 am
Morris	1/18/2006 3:15 pm	1/27/2006 8:00 am	2/7/2006 5:30 pm	4/20/2006 2:15 pm
Bell	1/20/2006 3:00 pm	1/27/2006 10:00 am	2/8/2006 8:00 am	3/14/2006 2:15 pm
Berry	1/25/2006 3:00 pm	1/30/2006 9:00 am	2/8/006 9:00 am	4/20/2006 3:15 pm
Blackwell	1/26/2006 3:00 pm	1/30/2006 10:30	2/8/2006 10:15 am	3/14/2006 3:15 pm
Blue	1/20/2006 4:00 pm	1/30/2006 12:00	2/8/2006 11:00 am	NA
Bowman	1/24/2006 3:00 pm	1/30/2006 1:00 pm	2/8/2006 1:00 pm	3/22/2006 3:00 pm
Brooks	1/24/2006 4:45 pm	1/30/2006 1:45 pm	2/2/2006 12:00 pm	NA

Interviews

Interviewing is a popular way to gather qualitative research data because talking is natural (Griffee, 2005). Unlike the use of surveys or questionnaires which are often used in quantitative research, interview techniques do not presuppose any statistical knowledge, and the people you interview might be

Table 4***Focus Groups Dates and Times***

School	Focus Group Date
Blackmon	My focus group meeting with the participants at Blackmon was held on February 14, 2006. I met with the teachers after school on a regular scheduled staff meeting date so that I wouldn't add another meeting to their schedule.
Mark	My focus group meeting with the participants at Mark Elementary School was held on February 7, 2006. The teachers chose the date of the meeting.

close at hand and willing to talk. As Patton (1990) explains, we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. He states:

We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

In this study I was interested in behaviors, feelings and how people interpret the world around them. I was also interested in past events that are impossible to relive (Merriam, 2001). Through one to one interviews, I was able to interpret the participant's perspectives. Interviews were a good way to get data for my study. Reissman (1993) states that interviews "are conversations in which

both participants/teller and listener/questioner develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both” (p. 55). Listeners can clarify uncertainties with follow-up questions. Although this method was suitable for my study, as an African American senior office staff member in the district where my research participants work, I was very careful in conducting the interviews. Because of my position of “power” in the district, I tried to make sure that I established trust with the participants by ensuring them that the data I collected would not be shared with their principal or anyone else in the system. I also had to make sure that I kept an open mind and remained subjective in my dealings with the participants. I could not let what I already knew about the schools influence my thoughts or actions.

Observations

Observation is the process of gathering data. In observation, “the researcher watches the behavior and documents the properties of the object” (Potter, 1996, p. 98). Observation data can represent first hand knowledge of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). Thus, spending time in the teachers’ classroom was a good way to explore my research topic. One way to meet this goal was to live in these classrooms, but instead, I observed for a couple of hours in order to see who the teachers favored. I used an observation form and recorded the number of times African American students were called on. I also looked to see if the “good work” displayed on the walls and boards was representative of all of the students in the room. I further looked to see if the pictures on the walls

(teaching tools) were pictures of African American people, White people and other people of color. I suspected that the teachers at the high performing school were more careful of including all of their students in the instructional process. More specifically, I looked for visual, verbal and behavioral evidence of stereotypes; visual, verbal, and behavioral evidence of expectations; and evidence of how stereotypes and expectations affect children.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviewing is a qualitative research method that allows people to express their points of views in a group setting (Villard, 2003). Focus group discussions can lead participants to influence each other's thinking in ways that cannot happen in a one to one setting. Focus groups serve to promote self disclosure among participants in a group by gaining the group's feelings, opinions and thoughts. Focus groups are not used to help researchers reach consensus or establish how many people hold certain views (Villard, 2003). They are most helpful when used to determine information about a given topic (Villard, 2003). The focus group sessions helped me determine how the teachers in my study formed expectations for the African American students they served. My experience as an educator led me to believe that discussion groups among teachers could help verify perceptions, feelings and thoughts about given subjects (Patton, 1990). Focus group interviews helped the teachers bring up ideas and questions that they may not have otherwise be brought up (Villard, 2003).

Data Analysis

I analyzed my data by using a coding system for qualitative data analysis and theorizing. Coding helped me examine my data by creating categories (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). I identified common themes and intertextuality that existed in the narratives of the participants as they expressed their beliefs, and ideas. Coding helped “create a written product that reads more like a list of findings than an integrated story” (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 25).

Subjectivity

All research is subject to researcher bias (Morrow, 2005; Peshkin, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Peshkin (1988) argues that researchers should be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their outcomes. In an article entitled: “In Search of Subjectivity-One’s Own,” Peshkin (1988) uncovers six I’s, (a) the Ethnic-Maintenance I; (b) the Community Maintenance I; (c) the E-Pluribus-Unum I; (d) the Justice-Seeking I; (e) the Pedagogical-Meliorist I; and (f) the Nonresearch Human I. He stated that the I’s may change from place to place which he called “situational subjectivity.” By this concept, he suggested that though we bring all of ourselves-(our full complement to subjective I’s)-to each new research site, a site and its particular condition will elicit only a subset of our I’s.

Peshkin (1988) said subjectivity can be seen as virtuous, “for it is the basis of researchers’ making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected” (p.

286). He further stated that he actively sought out his subjectivity when he conducted a study, "I did not want to happen upon it accidentally as I was writing up the data. I wanted to be aware of it in process, mindful of its enabling and disabling potential while the data were still coming in, not after the fact" (p. 286).

The topic of my study, "The Role of Pop Culture-Based Information and Stereotypes Verses Direct Knowledge of Individuals in Forming Teacher Expectations of African American Students," forced me to examine my subjectivity or the I's as described by Peshkin. *The Ethnic-Maintenance I* lived at the center of this topic for me. I am an African American citizen who went through the public schools system and who taught in and led numerous elementary schools. Throughout my experiences, I saw African American students mistreated and held to low expectations. During this study, I had to make sure that I did not let my personal experiences or feelings overshadow my results. In addition, I had to remain silent whenever teachers made statements that I felt were racially biased.

The *Community-Maintenance I* was relevant during this study because I conducted my research in Greensboro, North Carolina, a city I had lived in for over 20 years. Although I had lived in the town, I had not lived in the communities where the majority of the African American students in this study lived. I had to remember not to tie myself to the community and not to try to be "them."

I feel that the Justice-Seeking I crept up throughout my study. Since I am always bothered by injustice, I had to make sure that if I saw any acts of

mistreatment or injustice, that I did not let them affect my analysis. For example, when I saw a student being overlooked by a teacher because the teacher felt that the student was incapable of learning, I was able to remain in the class and not let the teacher know that I was bothered by her actions.

I was more careful of the *Pedagogical-Meliorist* I than any of the others. I was considered a star teacher when I was in the classroom. I also did my best when I was a principal to make sure that all students were given the best learning experiences possible. Throughout the study, I had to remain neutral in my thoughts and actions. Whenever I observed a poorly planned lesson or when I saw a child being humiliated in front of the group, I had to remember that I was acting as a student conducting research instead of an educator in our district.

As the researcher, I did not let my personal experiences affect my analysis or interpretation. I kept my subjectivity at the conscious level because when subjectivity remains unconscious, researchers do not knowingly clarify their personal stakes (Peshkin, 1991). Throughout this study I have made sure that my trustworthiness is revealed as I show data to support everything that I report.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION: EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

There is an achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts. Our educational system is not working for a large number of African American youth (Hall, 1982; Perry et al., 2003). Some researchers (Cross, 1996; Billingsley, 1992; Clarken, 1995) suggest that one reason for the gap could be attributed to the fact that teachers have lower expectations for African American students.

As explained in Chapter III, the study reported here was a limited case study on how teachers form expectations of African American students, focusing on whether they get to know children directly or if they form conclusions based on knowledge from pop culture stereotypes. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What expectations do teachers have of their African American students? How are these expectations formed?
2. How are these expectations associated with what the teachers feel they know about the students from direct knowledge of particular students, or from more generalized knowledge about stereotypes and other messages in popular culture?

3. What is the relative impact of pop culture and stereotypes, versus direct knowledge, on teachers' actions and interactions with students?

As a limited case study, this research used a qualitative perspective, making an effort to discern meaning of events to the participants (Riehl, 2001). The limited case study relied on interviews, observations and a focus group discussion at each school. I interviewed the participants for one hour and observed in their classrooms. Each observation session was followed by a debriefing interview. Before I interviewed the teachers, I interviewed the principals at each school. After data were collected from the interviews and observations, I held a focus group discussion at each location. The focus group discussion lasted one hour at Mark Elementary and two hours at Blackmon. The difference in the time was due to the questions that the participants posed to me about the research and their suggestions and comments about how other teachers in the district could benefit from going through the process that they had gone through. Blackmon's participants had more questions and remarks about the research process. Mark's teachers were more concerned about issues that related to educating African American children and how these children were viewed by our society. In fact, throughout the study, it was evident that the teachers at Mark Elementary were aware of the fact that the education system in the United States was not working for a number of African American students (Hale, 1982).

This research was conducted in two public elementary schools. I was a participant-observer at each school as I visited the classrooms to conduct learning walks and to engage in dialogue with the teachers and principals. I also had the opportunity to speak informally with parents and students, and I had regular conversations with the schools' secretaries and teacher assistants. The focus of this study is specifically on data from observations, teacher interviews and the focus group discussions during the specific time period of January 17, 2006 through March 30, 2006.

Mark Elementary School, one of the schools in this study was located in the middle of a government housing complex. There were approximately 625 students enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. As early as the 1970s, school leaders in the district were concerned about the progress of the students at Mark. In 1976 an effort was made to boost achievement scores by turning Mark into an IGE (Individually Guided Education) school. At that time the teachers were trained to meet the needs of their students without worrying about grade level placement. This concept was easy to implement due to the popularity of the open school concept during that era. The IGE curriculum helped the predominately African American students make progress and show high rates of growth.

A new principal was assigned to Mark in the 1980s. The district also got a new superintendent at this time. These changes not only caused the end of the IGE program at Mark, but they brought new concerns about the school. The new

school leaders were more troubled by the fact that Mark was segregated than what program was offered to the students. In an effort to integrate the school, the district decided to make Mark a magnet school. Thus, Mark Elementary became a Spanish Immersion School. The plan was developed in order to recruit White students throughout the county so that they could attend school with the African American neighborhood children. In spite of this effort, the African American students remained segregated as the Spanish Immersion became a school within a school. The students in the traditional classes were neighborhood students while the students in the Immersion Program were bused to the school from upper and middle class neighborhoods. The few African American students who were in the special program also came from upper and middle class families.

Mark Elementary was not known as a high achieving school until the end of the 1999-2000 school year. It was at that time that the African American, traditional students had the highest test scores in the district. At the time of this study, Mark had continued to hold the top spot on the highest performing elementary schools list from 2000-2005.

At the time of this study, Mark Elementary had one full- time principal and one assistant principal. In addition to the regular classroom teachers, the school had special teachers for music, art, physical education, special education, advanced learners, a counselor and a media specialist. The school also had teacher assistants and several part time tutors. During the time of this study nine

of the 36 classroom teachers were African American and six were Hispanic; the rest were Caucasian. All but one of the teachers were female and two teachers were new to the faculty; the rest had been at the school from 4 to 26 years. The principal was Hispanic and new to the school having completed only one year as a school administrator. Before coming to Mark, she worked as a graduate assistant at a nearby university. The assistant principal was a White male who was also new to the school. Although the Curriculum Facilitator was new to the school in her role, she had taught at the school for more than ten years.

In 2003, I was named the Instructional Improvement Officer for Mark Elementary School. This assignment gave me full access to the school and its operations. Throughout countless visits to school, I found the staff to be engaged in their work and very interested in the success of all of the students. When this project began, the school was celebrating its fourth year of having the highest achievement rate in the school district. In 2004, at the National ASCD conference in New Orleans, Mark was celebrated and honored as a school that dispelled the myth. Although the school had a high poverty rate and a high concentration of African American students, 98% of the students passed the North Carolina End of Grade tests. The school had also met the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Average Yearly Progress (AYP) standards since its implementation.

Since I often visited Mark, the teachers and staff members gladly invited me into their classrooms and were always eager to show me what their students were learning. In addition to supervising the principal at Mark, I also worked

closely with the teachers, focusing mainly on issues regarding academic improvement. My prior involvement at Mark helped open the door for me to conduct this research, and the participants expressed themselves more freely on sensitive issues. Because of their prior relationship with me, they were more honest and trusting in their responses.

During the course of this project, Mark held 8 regular faculty meetings, 10 grade level meetings and 10 school leadership meetings. The classroom teachers held weekly planning meetings that involved staff development activities such as cooperative learning, using graphic organizers, writing and “GCS Reads,” the school district’s reading program. I added two afternoon meetings for the participants in order to lead the focus group activity. In addition, there were also several parent meetings held that I was able to attend. The principal removed herself from this project by letting me arrange all of the meeting dates and classroom observations.

The staff at Mark took pride in what they had accomplished for their students. They also took pride in their belief statements that were posted throughout the school. In many classrooms the following was posted:

To lead us toward our mission, our school community shares the following:

- All children can learn.
- All children want to succeed.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs.

- Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Motivation inspires learning.
- All students are the responsibility of all staff.
- We have high expectations for all students, parents and staff.
- We function as a learning organization that promotes opportunities for all who have a stake in the success of the school.
- Teaching and learning are supported and achieved in collaborative environments.

The second elementary school of study was Blackmon Elementary. This school was located in a rural, medium to low socioeconomic area. This school enrolled approximately 530 students in pre kindergarten through fifth grade. Demographically, the student population was similar to Mark's population although there were a few more White students enrolled. Approximately 80% of the students were African American, 17% White, 2% Hispanic and 1% Multi-racial. Seventy five percent of the student body were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Because of the high free and reduced rate, the school was classified as a Title I school. Student transience was a significant issue in the school. Although this school was located in a rural setting, many students were bused from apartment complexes. This kept the population mobile as families moved in and out of the district. None of the above numbers were as high as the demographics

at Mark even though the achievement rate at Blackmon was much lower. Overall, Mark's free and reduced lunch rate was 50%; however that 50% represented all the students in the Traditional Program. If the school did not have the Immersion Program, the school would have been 100% free and reduced lunch.

Blackmon had one full-time principal and no assistant principal. In addition to the regular classroom teachers, the school had special teachers for art, music, physical education, guided reading, a media specialist and a curriculum facilitator. The school also had several teacher assistants and part time tutors. During the time of this study, six of the 25 classroom teachers and one of the five special teachers were African American; the rest were White. All but one of the teachers were female. One male teacher and 7 female teachers were new to the faculty; the rest had been in the school from three to 30 years. The principal was White and had been at the school for four years after having served as a middle school principal in another county. The curriculum facilitator was White and was new in this role although she had been at the school as a classroom teacher for four years.

Like Mark, Blackmon was another school where I served in the role as Instructional Improvement Officer. For three years I had visited the school on a regular basis and had spent a great deal of time talking and planning with the principal. Before conducting this study, I had spent some limited time in the classrooms, but I had never spent a great deal of time talking and interacting with the teachers on a regular basis. The teachers were excited to work with me on

this project and they seemed very open and honest in their responses. For the most part, the staff was congenial with each other, although they did not seem as connected to each other or the school mission as the teachers at Mark appeared to be. Teachers who were not selected to participate in the study often stopped me in the hallways to talk about the district wide incentives and the lack of time that they had for planning and implementing what the district wanted them to do. On several occasions, I found myself involved in school business more than in collecting data for my study.

During the course of this project, Blackmon had six regular staff meetings, 10 grade level meetings and 10 school leadership meetings. The curriculum facilitator also had many STARS (School Teams Achieving Reaching for Success) team meetings that included staff development activities on cooperative learning, guided reading, math strategies, and graphic organizers. I planned two additional afternoon meetings with the teachers who were involved in this study. The principal was very cooperative and interested in my topic. She worked closely with me as I scheduled the meetings and classroom observations. Her enthusiasm was contagious to her staff. They seemed eager to help make a difference for the students in Guilford County.

Unlike the teachers at Mark, the teachers at Blackmon did not “speak the same language” in my interview sessions in regard to their mission or vision for their students. However on their school website, the following mission or goals were cited:

At Blackmon, we focus on student achievement. Our superstars love to learn. They strive to do their best in everything they do! Here are some of the programs utilized at our school:

- Title I Reading
- Focused, Vertical Curriculum
- Literacy First
- Battle of the Books
- Advanced Learner Program
- Accelerated Reader
- Character Education
- Cooperative Learning
- Partnership with Rehoboth Church Volunteers
- NC A&T Student Interns
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Student Council, which sponsors many student-centered events
- EOG Boot Camp
- DARE

As stated previously, the teachers for this study were randomly selected.

The participants at Mark were assigned names that begin in the letter M. The names used were; Mrs. May, Ms. Michelangelo, Mrs. Michaels, Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Montgomery and Mrs. Morris. The participants from Blackmon were

assigned names that started with the letter, “B.” The names used were; Mrs. Bell, Mr. Berry, Mrs. Blackwell, Mrs. Blue, Mrs. Bowman and Mrs. Brooks.

Table 5

Mark Elementary School Participants

Teacher	Grade Level	Race	Gender	Years of Experience	Years at Mark Elementary
Mrs. May	K	African American	Female	15	9
Mrs. Michelangelo	4	White	Female	1	1
Mrs. Michaels	1	African American	Female	28	10
Mrs. Mitchell	3	African American	Female	22	20
Mrs. Montgomery	K-5	White	Female	30	1
Mrs. Morris	2	White	Female	16	14

Mrs. May, an African American, was born and raised in Greensboro, North Carolina. She grew up with many teacher role models in her life. Her mother taught at the college level and her cousins, aunts and uncles were public school teachers. Even though Mrs. May was surrounded by educators; teaching was the last thing on her mind. “I wanted to help people so I went off to college to be a nurse at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro,” she said. After Mrs. May spent a couple of years at UNCG, she decided that she needed a break from nursing. She discovered that she didn’t like the sight of blood and that she

was a bit too sensitive to be a care giver. As she pondered what to do with her life, Mrs. May decided to accept a teaching assistant position at Mark Elementary. Serving in this important role, Mrs. May was bitten by the teaching bug.

I loved working with the students so much. I got excited when I helped them learn. I decided while I was a teacher assistant that I had to go back to school and become a teacher. I realized that I couldn't run away from the professional any longer. I loved it and it felt good to make a difference in the students' lives. (Mrs. May, Jan., 2006)

When Mrs. May finished her studies, she got a teaching job at a school in an affluent neighborhood. She became a very popular teacher, who received many parent requests. Although she enjoyed her students and liked working at the school, she missed her students at Mark. After spending six years at the school loaded with children from privileged backgrounds, Mrs. May requested a transfer to Mark. "I felt that I could be of more service to the students here," she reported. At the time of this study, Mrs. May had been at Mark for 9 years.

Ms. Michelangelo was not the typical teacher at Mark Elementary. Not because she was White, but because she was a first year teacher. Mark had a very low attrition rate, and most of the teachers had at least three or more years of teaching there. Ms. Michelangelo grew up in the Washington, DC area, in Fairfax County. She came to North Carolina after attending Appalachian State University in North Carolina. She stated that she became a teacher because she felt that it was a way she could really make a difference. Ms. Michelangelo

admitted that her first year of teaching at Mark Elementary has been challenging for her. Like all beginning teachers, she struggled with managing her students. In spite of her needed growth in this area, Ms. Michelangelo felt good about being at Mark. She shared a success story during the first interview:

I have a little boy in my class who was angry a lot. When I first met him, he was having lots of problems. He couldn't stay in my class very long at first. Now he is doing better because I am learning to listen to him and he is learning that you can't throw things when you are angry. (Mrs. Michelangelo, Jan., 2006)

During the 2004-2005 school year, Mrs. Michaels was the Title I reading teacher at Mark. Due to the budget cuts, Mrs. Michaels could no longer serve the students at Mark in that role. A seasoned educator of 28 years, Mrs. Michaels decided to accept a first grade teaching position in order to stay on staff at Mark. A native of South Carolina, Mrs. Michaels moved to North Carolina when she was two years old. She said that she could relate to the students at Mark because she came from a similar background to theirs:

I am a product of divorced parents. We moved to Charlotte, North Carolina when I was two years old. I moved back to South Carolina when I was in the 5th grade. We moved to Greensboro when I was in the 8th grade and I have been here ever since. We moved to Greensboro after we had been homeowners only to move into public housing. So I spent my middle school, high school, college and first year of teaching in the projects. I can relate to these students. These children could be me. (Mrs. Michaels, Jan. 2006)

Mrs. Michaels reported that she decided to become a teacher after teaching her father how to read. "I sat down with him and I would ask him to tell me the words. I taught him to read and that was powerful."

Mrs. Michaels worked in schools that had high poverty rates throughout her entire career. After spending years as a classroom teacher, she worked at Mark for 8 years as a Reading Recovery teacher before the program was phased out. When the former principal decided to use Title I funds to hire a reading teacher, Mrs. Michaels was hired to fill the position until those funds were cut. After I randomly selected Mrs. Michael for this project, she telephoned my office and asked me if she could have a meeting with me. At the meeting, she asked me if I could help her find a reading teacher position for the 2006-2007 school year. She said that it had been a long time since she had been in the classroom and she really would appreciate it if I found her another reading teacher position within the district. When Mark's Title I funds were cut for the 2005-2006 school year, Mrs. Michaels told her principal that she would take a first grade teaching position in order to remain at Mark. She later realized that she missed working with children in small groups.

Mrs. Mitchell was the teacher with the most tenure that I interviewed at Mark Elementary. She began her career at Mark and except for a short stint at another school in the district; she spent all of her 22 years at Mark. Mrs. Mitchell grew up in a small community in Randolph County, North Carolina. She

attributed her rearing in her hometown area as the reason she became a teacher:

Growing up in the country there isn't a lot to do. My aunt, who lived next door to us was the youth director and she used to make us learn speeches for all occasions, be it Mother's Day, Father's Day or whatever. She always told me that my handwriting was pretty. She used to ask me to help the younger kids with their speeches, and I seemed to always have something to say, and I had a good memory. I often tell people that she made me a teacher because she let me be in charge and I kind of liked to take charge of things. (Mrs. Mitchell, Jan., 2006)

Mrs. Mitchell was proud to share that she left Mark in order to be closer to home only to find out that she missed the challenges she had faced before leaving.

I wanted to be closer to home. You see, I commute here every morning. So I transferred to a school on the other side of town. A lot of people thought I was crazy when I came back to Mark because I didn't have the same challenges at the new school that I have here. But- I missed the kids. I missed making the big difference in the children's lives that I had made and I transferred back. I still drive all the way here every morning. (Mrs. Mitchell, Jan. 2006)

Although Mrs. Montgomery was a teacher, she technically worked as an academic coach for the school district assigned to Mark. She worked very closely with all teachers and the curriculum facilitator. She also interacted with the students. A native of Greensboro, Mrs. Montgomery spend all of her teaching experience in the district. Before working at Mark, Mrs. Montgomery worked in a school in a more affluent area. She also worked at a school where the population changed from all White to approximately 99% African American. She took pride

in the fact that she never taught the African American students any different than she had treated the White students.

I was so fortunate; I had a principal who taught us to work with all students and to hold them to the same levels. I remember when I taught at Gordon Elementary, Mr. Johnson expected our best at all times, no matter when the students began to change. He expected our best and we expected the students' best. We got good results too. (Mrs. Montgomery, Jan., 2006)

Mrs. Morris joined Mark's faculty with a high school Spanish background after moving to the area from Georgia. She worked at Mark while she finished the North Carolina teacher certification process to teach at the elementary level. Like Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Morris had many opportunities to teach at other schools. Like her parents who spent their years helping others, Mrs. Morris felt that by staying at Mark, she was making a difference in the lives of many people.

I grew up in that kind of atmosphere. You know, it is not like I just woke up one morning and decided to do it. I think it just happened based on the atmosphere. (Mrs. Montgomery, Jan. 2006)

Mrs. Bell grew up in an all White, middle class neighborhood in the mountains of North Carolina. As a young child, she never interacted with African Americans. Her first experience of going to school with them was when she reached high school. She reported that the star basketball player was African American.

I remember that I was in high school when I was exposed to African Americans. There were only three or four of them in the whole school. I can remember we had one African American boy who was gorgeous. He

was on the football team and everything. He called my house once and asked me for a date. It shocked me. I did not go out with him, and I did not get upset or anything, I was just shocked. (Mrs. Bell, Feb., 2006)

Table 6

Blackmon Elementary School Participants

Teacher	Grade Level	Race	Gender	Years of Experience	Years at Blackmon Elementary
Mrs. Bell	3	White	Female	15	6
Mr. Berry	4	White	Male	2	2
Mrs. Blackwell	K	African American	Female	4	2
Mrs. Blue	5	African American	Female	10	10
Mrs. Bowman	1	African American	Female	33	5
Mrs. Brooks	Pre K	White	Female	3	3

Mrs. Bell decided to become a teacher after she was in fourth grade. Her experiences with what she referred to as the “sweetest teacher in the world,” made her feel as if she could make a difference for children too. After graduating from college, Mrs. Bell traveled around the world, teaching in government schools on military bases until her husband decided to leave the armed forces. Subsequent to joining the Blackmon staff, Mrs. Bell taught at another elementary school in the district, taught at a private school, and stayed home for seven years.

Mr. Berry grew up in Greensboro in an affluent all White neighborhood. He attended what he referred to as the “better schools,” and he chose the teaching profession because he believed that he could make a difference.

There were a lot of kids in my neighborhood when I was in high school and I used to love working with them. They made me want to be a teacher. To this day, I still love working with kids. (Mr. Berry, Feb., 2006)

At the time of this study, Mr. Berry was not only the only male certified staff member, but he was also the teacher with the least experience.

Mrs. Blackwell grew up on the coast of North Carolina. Being a regular classroom teacher was not the career path she had envisioned as she sought to pursue her dreams.

I wanted to work with special needs children because I was always so good with them. There was a little special needs child in my neighborhood, and I was always the one to say, “stop, you are doing it wrong.” I ended up just majoring in Education and since then, I have never thought of doing anything else. (Mrs. Blackwell, Feb., 2006)

Before joining the staff at Blackmon, Mrs. Blackwell taught in an inner city school in a nearby district. Though she was a beginning teacher, she was given her first challenge by starting at a school after the first ten days and receiving a classroom of students that the other third grade teachers eagerly released to her. Following this occurrence, Mrs. Blackwell felt that she was ready to tackle any teaching obstacle.

Mrs. Blue grew up in Brooklyn New York. Her path to the teaching vocation was not traditional. Mrs. Blue graduated from a junior college and worked in a bank in New York City. After she had a baby, she started looking for other employment. She sought an occupation that would not keep her away from her daughter too long. She decided to go back to junior college and get another degree, this time in Elementary Education. She wanted to get this degree so that she could get a job in the daycare center where her daughter was enrolled, which she did.

I never wanted to be a teacher originally. I just wanted a job that would allow me more time with my baby. After my baby was born, it was hard for me to go back to that bank. I started looking for a job that would let me get home before 4 o'clock. So I decided to work at a daycare center. I went back to school and I got an associate's degree. I got the job and I didn't mind working for less money as long as I had time for my kid. I never dreamed at the time that I would end up liking teaching so much. (Mr. Blue, Jan., 2006)

The experiences she had at the daycare center gave her the desire to become a teacher. She immediately enrolled at a four-year college and started taking courses in order to get licensed. While visiting some friends in North Carolina, she met her current husband and moved to North Carolina. At the age of 31, Mrs. Blue finished college and began teaching at Blackmon.

Mrs. Bowman was the teacher at Blackmon with the most teaching experience. A veteran teacher for 33 years, Mrs. Bowman showed no signs of stopping.

I love teaching, and it is the only thing I can imagine myself doing. I have a lot of years in this profession, but I am not ready to stop. As long as I feel that I am making a difference in my students' lives, I am going to keep on doing it. (Mrs. Bowman, Jan., 2006)

Before coming to Blackmon, Mrs. Bowman worked in several different schools in the district. She worked at schools that were heavily impacted by poverty, as well as at schools that were not. At one point during her career, she left the classroom and became a curriculum facilitator. In this role, she worked closely with teachers by providing staff development activities. In addition, she served on many district- wide task forces and committees in order to help improve the working conditions. At the end of many days during this study, Mrs. Bowman left Blackmon Elementary late in the afternoon only to serve in another teaching role. For on those occasions, she worked at a local community college, teaching adults how to read.

Mrs. Brooks was next to Mr. Berry on the new teacher scale at Blackmon. She began her career two years before Mr. Berry. Growing up in Greensboro in an all White neighborhood, her childhood background was similar to his. In her mind, she too attended the better schools which were different from the ones that Mr. Berry attended. Like Mrs. Blue, Mrs. Brooks began her education at a community college, received an associate's degree, worked in a daycare center and then decided to become a licensed classroom teacher. Mrs. Brooks never wanted to teach beyond kindergarten.

My kindergarten teacher caused me to want to become a teacher. She made me want to be a teacher just like her. I never wanted to teach any grade beyond kindergarten because I don't like all of the other stuff those teachers have to do with all that testing. (Mrs. Brooks, Feb., 2006)

Before joining the staff at Blackmon, Mrs. Brooks worked as a kindergarten teacher at an elementary school in the district. Her former school was much different from Blackmon in that it was predominately White with students from much higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Although all teachers in this study reported that they loved working with children, the teachers at Mark demonstrated that they got to know their students and they appeared to have "ownership" in their students' lives. The teachers at Blackmon revealed that they cared about their students; however, they did not seem to go beyond the call of duty like the teachers at Mark did.

The School Leaders

One of my objectives in interviewing the principals was to obtain their assessments of which teachers had high or low expectations for their students.

Mark Elementary

During this study the principal at Mark Elementary, Margo Sanchez was completing her second year. She took over as principal at Mark without any other administration experience. Dr. Sanchez declared in my interview that all of her teachers were sensitive to the needs of African American students:

All of my teachers are good with all students. They care so much about these children. I do have a few teachers who have low expectations, but

for the most part, they all work hard. They visit the students' homes and everything. (Dr. Sanchez, Jan., 2006)

Blackmon Elementary

Mrs. Reid became the principal at Blackmon in 2002. Before being assigned to Blackmon, Mrs. Reid had worked as a middle school principal, elementary assistant principal and special education teacher in a nearby school system. Although Blackmon's achievement schools were low at the time of this study, they were even lower before Mrs. Reid's reign. She expressed her concerns about the school in her interview with me;

I am working so hard to help the teachers at this school see that our children are capable of learning. The problem here is that a few of the older teachers keep making statements about how the population at the school has changed. What they are saying is that we lost many of our White students due to redistricting. And some of them are of the mind set that we lost our smart children. They are getting better, but it has been a struggle for me since I first got here. (Mrs. Reid, Feb., 2006)

I asked Mrs. Reid which of her teachers held the highest expectations for her African American students, she reported;

I was so happy to hire Mrs. Blackwell. She really has helped make a difference here with her attitude. She came here from an inner city school, and she often tells the staff how much easier it is to teach in a school like this one. I have some other teachers who get good results too. Teachers like Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Blue. Mr. Berry has really turned around. Last year, he had a difficult time. He just couldn't manage his classroom. He told me that he finally realized that all he needed to do was to get to know them. I am very proud of him. We are not where we need to be yet, but we are getting there. (Mrs. Reid, Feb., 2006)

What Teachers Know and Expect about African American Students

To understand what teachers know about and expect of their African American students, I talked with them through interviews and focus group meetings and I observed them while performing their practice. Since most of the teachers were engaged in instruction during the day, I met with them after school and held the interviews in their classrooms. One teacher wanted to talk to me over the telephone. She stated that she really didn't have time to meet with me because she was always busy preparing for her students. During the time of this study, teachers throughout Guilford County were pulled frequently out of their buildings for district wide staff development opportunities. Knowing this, I was very considerate of the teachers' time, and I held my interviews and focus group meetings on days when other meetings were not held. The participants were often willing to meet late in the afternoons. I divided my questions for the interviews into the following categories; direct knowledge of students, familiarity with pop culture/stereotypes, low expectations of African American students and high expectations of African American students. The direct knowledge of student questions were:

1. What can you tell me about the African American students' social background?
2. Have you ever had an African American student achieve at a higher rate than you expected? If so, what do you think caused this to happen?

3. How do you get to know your African American students?
4. What do you know about the learning styles of African American students?
5. What experiences other than in your work environment have you had with African Americans?
6. What is your definition of culturally relevant instruction? How is this a part of your practice, if at all? Why or why not?

I asked the following questions to determine the participants' familiarity with pop culture and stereotypes:

1. What role does your African American students' social background play in their learning? How do you know this or what informs your thinking on this?
2. Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students?
3. How do you think African Americans are portrayed on television and popular culture or in the media? Have you found these portrayals accurate based on your knowledge of your students? How so, how not?

To analyze whether or not the participants might have low expectations of African American students, I asked the following questions:

1. How many African American students do you think will score 4s on the EOG?

2. What do you know about the learning styles of African American students?
3. Is it unusual for your African American students to be the top students in a classroom? Why or Why not?
4. Have you ever had an African American student achieve at a higher rate than you expected? If so what do you think cause this to happen?

Determining whether or not the teachers might have high expectations involved my asking the following questions:

1. What conditions causes your African American students to achieve at high rates?
2. Is it unusual for your African American students to be the top students in a classroom? Why or why not?

At the interview sessions, I used a tape recorder to record the teachers' answers to the questions. I transcribed the tapes and I documented observation notes. On many occasions, I was invited back to the classroom to see some type of student performance or to see the teacher introduce an idea to the students. All twelve teachers seemed eager to talk to me. After the first six interviews, I started all sessions by telling the participants that they could be brief in their responses. Each session lasted at least one hour on tape, but the conversation always continued as I was headed out of the door. I was amazed at how freely the participants talked to me and how eager and willing they were to make their thoughts known. Although I had spent a great deal of time in both schools before

conducting this study, I learned so much more about how the teachers felt about their students. Consistent with Kuykendall (2004), I sought to see if what I saw on the surface was what was really happening at each site. Table 7 represents summaries and/or exemplary quotes from the participants as they relate to the interview questions.

Talking the Talk: Discussion about the Interview Data

Interviewing the teachers at Mark and Blackmon was a very interesting experience for me. As stated earlier, I had been in and out of the schools for three years, and all of the participants felt that they knew me. On one occasion at Mark prior to this study, I had attended a meeting and I watched how the teachers interacted with each other. I felt that they were a little guarded in their responses to each other due to my presence at the meeting. This also had happened at Blackmon. Before I conducted the interviews, I was worried that the teachers would not tell me their honest feelings and thoughts or that they would shut down and not be open to discussion. Luckily, this was not the case. I found that by listening, I did not make the participants feel as if I were more competent or smarter than they were (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). This made them talk freely as they answered all of questions.

Issues of diversity can be one of the biggest challenges teachers can face (Delpit, 1995; Kailin, 2002; Obidah & Teel, 2001). In spite of the fact that most large school districts have an increasingly growing population of children of color educators continue to remain uncertain in how to meet these students' needs.

Table 7

Participant Interview Responses

What can you tell me about your African American students' social background?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	Our students come from very low socioeconomic backgrounds. They walk to school because they live right here in the projects. Most of them love coming to school, because they know I love them and I work with them all of the time. I don't let them use their home lives as excuses for not learning.
Michelangelo	The students here are from a very low economic background. There is so much poverty in the homes here. The children that I work with are less fortunate than others, so the drive for school is not always there.
Michaels	A lot of them are a part of an extended family. They have a lot of cousins, and what I find very interesting is that it seems like everybody here has god sisters and god cousins. They have a lot of relationships, not so much the traditional father and mother relationship, not that at all. But they have a lot of extended families always bringing in other people and just adopting them into the family. They like to have fun and a good time. The kids share this with me.
Mitchell	These kids have a hard life away from school. That is why I do so many home visits. I want the parents to see me as a partner in raising their children. Lately, I have had to start out early because I have been here so long that when I walk over to their homes, I always see former students and parents who take up a lot of my time. They always have something to tell me.
Montgomery	My students are sweet children. They live in government subsidized housing. Their parents trust me to work with them and help them learn what they need to learn.
Morris	I think it is. For instance, last year I had a student who was living in a homeless shelter and by knowing that, I was able to help intervene a couple of times and help the mother with things. I helped her get a special calculator to help her with her college work at A&T and stuff like that. I have some African American students on free and reduced lunch although we aren't supposed to know.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What can you tell me about your African American students' social background?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	I am surprised that this year most of my students are from two-parent homes. Some of my students have grandparents raising them. Most of them have two parents, but the parents aren't always able to come to school.
Berry	I think for the most part that the African American students here have pretty good home lives. I think their parents stay on them a lot and and make them do their homework. I have four maybe five students that seem like their parents are not at home a lot, and their homework never comes in or it comes in incorrect.
Blackwell	I was surprised by the parents at this school. I came here from a school that was 99% African American so I thought that the parents here would be like the parents I had worked with previously. But- all of my students aren't like the inner city students I was used to. I have lots of children who come from fine families, parents who want their children to always do their best. They are taught to be well behaved, and all of them aren't street smart like the students I was used to.
Blue	This school was different 14 years ago. I had many more White students. I don't know when it changed. I look back in my yearbook and I don't know when it changed. Most of my students are from single parent households. Only about 5 of mine are from two- parent families. I think that when children have two parents, they do better because they have more support.
Bowman	Most of them have brothers and sisters at this school. Most of them have two parents, although some live with their moms, but have contact with their dads. My parents are working parents and very supportive. The parents always respond to me, and the children always do their homework.
Brooks	Some of them know a lot of street smarts. They know how to interact with their friends, you know, cool. They interact with their friends, but their parents don't influence them. They have a lot of outside influences, and I don't know why that happens, but I see it a lot. My assistant is African American and she will say to them, "Don't act like you are out with one of your friends." So you see there is a good balance because there is one each of us.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Have you ever had an African American student achieve at a higher rate than you expected? If so what do you think caused this to happen?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	Oh, yes! I don't know what happened.
Michelangelo	No, I haven't because my expectations are always very high.
Michaels	I am not going to say higher than I expected because I expect you to be here. I always say you are a Johnson and you are a Michaels.
Mitchell	The last three years, every single student passed the EOG during the first testing administration period. But I didn't expect anything less.
Montgomery	Yes, I have, and it surprises me because I always have the mindset that my students can achieve.
Morris	Yeah, I got one in here that surprises me on occasions, and I've got another one, she is kind on a lower level, but she has been performing well in her writing and her retelling.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Have you ever had an African American student achieve at a higher rate than you expected? If so what do you think caused this to happen?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	Yes I have! I had an experience with that last year. I had two children last year in my small guided reading group, and they would come to this room, and I would brag on them, and we would shout when they achieved and celebrate with them for not missing words, and both of those children went from Level I to Level III. It was probably because of the small group and direct teaching.
Berry	Yes and the reason, I basically had a good relationship with the students and a good relationship with the parents.
Blackwell	Yes, like I told you I came to this school thinking that the African American students here were like the ones I taught in my old school. I was so wrong. I thought they were all street smart, and I thought they came from different kinds of homes than they did. I discovered that children had manners, and that they had lots of parental support.
Blue	Yes, because I have very high expectations, and sometimes I set them higher than I should, and I been pleasantly surprised in many cases when they exceed my expectations. It really makes me feel good when that happens.
Bowman	No, because my expectation rate is very high and I know they can get there.
Brooks	No, I think they can achieve just as fast as other children. If they have the mentality already, they can grow it.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How do you get to know your African American students?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	I go into the neighborhood. I let them know that I am not only their teacher, but I am their friend. I am the mother figure. I want the children to know that I want to be the person that they can come to if they have a problem, someone they can depend on and count on.
Michelangelo	I send home progress reports; I try to send a newsletter every week. This week I didn't send one, because it was a short week. I send home notes, and I try to schedule conferences at least once a week. I also try to catch the parents when they come in the morning, so that I can talk to them about their children.
Michaels	I do a lot of getting to know you activities at the beginning of the year.
Mitchell	I use the assessment that we have to use, but I also try to spend time with my students on a one-on-one basis. I just talk to them to get to know these persons. I find out about their families, I find out about their siblings and things that they like and don't like about school. I ask them this because my focus is to change what they don't like. I want them to like coming to school because when they love being here, they want to make it a joy for me. It takes time to do this at the beginning of the year, but it is worth it because you can find out some things. I might learn that Dad is away, and he is supposed to be coming back home, and I want him to come back home. That is the kind of thing you can learn. You know when the child changes, something is wrong. A little light goes off, and you remember and you can pull that child to the side. You know little personal things.
Montgomery	I get to know my students on a one-to-one basis, and I develop a working relationship with my parents. We work together, and I really get to know my students that way.
Morris	At the very beginning of the year, I try to get them to talk to me. We introduce ourselves. I tell them about me and I ask them about them. When we do any kind of small group work and I can work with a few kids at a time, I try to get to know them as individuals with their preferences and likes or whatever you know, an inventory or anything like that. I don't read their cum folders. Sometimes I talk to their last year teacher, but I don't make a big deal of doing that unless there is something specific I need to know. I want to get to know them as a blank slate.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How do you get to know your African American students?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	Well, first of all, I do a lot of assessments. I do feel that assessment is a part of learning. I have a lot of contact with the parents. I am very well known for staying in touch with the parents, and I try at the beginning of the year to talk to them, and I try to find out from them what they think their child is like. I also talk to the children one-on-one.
Berry	I have a couple of different ways. I give them a couple of assignments so that I can determine what they can do. I have writing assignments that will help me know about them and their interests. I talk to the previous teacher. The problem with this class is that a lot of these students were not here last year.
Blackwell	I don't make any plans during the first week of school. I watch my students and see how they interact with each other and with me. I watch their parents and see how they interact with their children.
Blue	First of all, I always tell the parents that I don't care what has happened in the past that I want them to know that when they enter my classroom they come in here with a clean slate. I don't talk to the previous teachers, although they come in here trying to tell me stuff.
Bowman	We interview each other. I tell them something about myself, and they tell me things about themselves like their favorite color, their hobbies and things like that. I don't talk to the previous teachers because I want to find out things about myself. Names do get thrown around, but I don't listen.
Brooks	What is great about preK is that we are required to do home visits. We get to see firsthand what their home environment is like, and we get to see what they might use and how styles are different and what they might use at home.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What do you know about the learning styles of African American students?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	All children have different learning styles. I don't think it is just African American children.
Michelangelo	I think every student is different and I want to make a basis that all people could I wouldn't say that this group could or this group could, because I think every kid is different. I have one kid that could listen and think, "I got it," and I could have another kid who I would have to sit down and help them get it. You can't just say that this is the all encompassing way to deal with kids.
Michaels	I think we love to, you know, we've got to feel it. We are very-you know there is a rhythm to life. That might mean bringing in the singing, just the you know, you got to move with it even like when I am teaching reading, I do it with rhythm. I think it is natural for us and they tend to identify with that.
Mitchell	They learn like everyone else.
Montgomery	There is no separation in terms of Black and White. Many children have different learning styles that need to be addressed by teachers.
Morris	I think there is a range of different learning styles for African American students just like other students. You have some that are going to need visual stimulus, some that are going to need auditory, some are going to need a combination of various stimuli, and you just have to see what fits with any given child. It depends more on the child than the child's race. Now if you are looking at socioeconomics, you are going to have to provide a lot of stimuli because they have not had that.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What do you know about the learning styles of African American students?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	I do know that sometimes a lot of the children and I am speaking more of my experiences here at Blackmon and we do have some children who don't have the background knowledge, and they maybe don't have magazines to read, and they don't have books that they can choose from to read. As far as the children that I teach at Blackmon I have not seen that much of a gap in the learning styles.
Berry	To be honest with you, I try to treat all learning styles the same. I don't really have any different things for that.
Blackwell	They learn like every one else.
Blue	They have a lot of rhythm and you have to teach them that way. I try to make sure that I have lessons where they can move.
Bowman	I think African American children are just like other children. All children have different learning styles.
Brooks	I know that some need stronger influences. I know some of mine do. The parents really push and you have to be a little harsher with them. When my assistant speaks to them, she speaks harder than I do and they listen to her- Not all of the time but some of the time.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What experiences other than in your work environment have you had with African American students?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	I have worked with African American children all of my life.
Michelangelo	I grew up in the DC area and my best friends, a lot of them were African American and I attended integrated schools that were much more so than in Guilford County.
Michaels	I have worked with African Americans all of my life.
Mitchell	I have worked with African Americans all of my life. I have also spent most of my teaching career in predominately African American schools. As you know, I left for a short while.
Montgomery	I went to school with African Americans. I was probably one of the first White students to attend desegregated schools in Greensboro.
Morris	Well, if you want to go way back in my youth, my mother worked and there was no such thing as daycare. There was always a lady who came to my house to take care of us. It was my sister and me. I have pictures of my youth being cared for by an African American woman who didn't live with us, but she worked for us. She came and took care of us during the day when we were preschool age and after school when we were school age, because my mother worked and her job demanded that she be there until six o'clock at night. I wish I could recall her name. It has been so long, but I remember my family doing things like taking things to that family at Christmas time and doing things like taking them food. It was a very loving relationship and that person was with me for years until we moved from Georgia. But once we moved to North Carolina I was over at the middle school, and we didn't have that kind of circumstance. We had a grandmother that lived next door to us. Other situations that I remember, a very elderly doctor who had long retired lived next door to us and three women took care of her around the clock. Two of the ladies that took care of her were African Americans.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What experiences other than in your work environment have you had with African American students?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	When I was in elementary and high school, I was not exposed to many African Americans. I remember when I was in high school; there were only three or four African Americans. I can remember we had one African American boy who was gorgeous. He was on the football team and everything. One day my mother answered the phone and said, "Honey, there is someone on the phone for you." She knew a lot of my friends and she said, "I think it is Johnny." And that was all she said. He was the Black boy and he asked me out on a date. I haven't had much experience working with African Americans except for at school and at this company that helped write essays. I did some part-time work there and a little bit of summer work as a team leader. I had a lot of very good African Americans who were good workers on my team. I did have that exposure.
Berry	Growing up and pretty much throughout school it seemed that the older I got, the more African Americans I was around in school. In elementary school there weren't many and when I went to middle school, it was like a big culture clash for me because I was used to being around White kids and in middle school it was about 50% African American. It was very interesting and very alarming at times.
Blackwell	I have worked with African Americans all of my life.
Blue	When I was in New York I worked in a daycare center that had all Black children I have worked with African Americans all of my life.
Bowman	I have been around and worked with African Americans all of my life.
Brooks	I taught kindergarten before teaching preK and I had some African American students in that class. When I went to elementary and high school there weren't many African Americans.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

<p>What is your definition of culturally relevant instruction? How is this a part of your practice, if at all? Why or why not?</p> <p>Mark Elementary School</p>	
Participant	Response
May	I think that it might mean that the instruction as it pertains to the students' gender and culture should meet their needs. It is a part of my practice as a teacher, but I hadn't thought of it that way.
Michelangelo	It means do you make sure that you include African American literature. I think that no matter what my class is made up of, it would be a part of my practice. I think the more you expose kids to different cultures, the better. I think we should talk about things like Martin Luther King Day, but my kids are going to also learn about Sitting Bull. We are not just going to talk about Black/White; we are going to learn about Ceasar Childress, because I think having grown up around diversity, I didn't realize how lucky I was. I understand a lot about different cultures. I understand a lot of different religions, but when you teach children who haven't had that kind of exposure, you think, oh, my goodness. You have to start at square one with the fact that there are different cultures so that we don't do the students a disservice when we only talk of things in Black and White.
Michaels	I don't think I can answer that.
Mitchell	Relevant means that it has to deal with what is important and culture could refer to the group of students you work with. I don't know if it means the dialect that is used. I especially think of that when I think of social studies and science. For example, one of the first things I did, we had to go to Hunter Center for voting, and I spoke to that gentleman and found out that there was a low turnout for voting. I jumped onboard. My class and I did, and we ended up doing all kinds of flyers. We sent out a little survey as a quick way to see if the parents were going to be voting and the different reasons why they didn't. Then we started talking, and we talked about how Blacks had struggled and how Rosa Parks struggled and how many people died to make sure we could have voting rights. We also had some Native Americans so we pulled in the fact that they had the right to vote too. I really pushed the issue and the kids went home and influenced what happened last year. The man that I worked with called back and asked me to put my students on the speaker phone because he wanted to congratulate them. At the beginning of our project only 27% of our families said they would vote and after the lesson, 87, I think 87% ended up voting. My kids went to see the voting turn out and they got their Kids Voting badges. I think that is culturally relevant instruction.

Table 7—Cont’d

Participant Interview Responses

What is your definition of culturally relevant instruction? How is this a part of your practice, if at all? Why or why not?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Montgomery	It means providing educational opportunities for all children.
Morris	I really can’t answer that question. I have never heard of that term.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

<p>What is your definition of culturally relevant instruction? How is this a part of your practice, if at all? Why or why not?</p> <p>Blackmon Elementary School</p>	
Participant	Response
Bell	Relevant means making a connection and culturally relevant means do I make the instruction fit with my students. Oh, yes! I do that.
Berry	I guess it would be instruction that is relevant to the students. Yes, I do this. I make it a point to do this.
Blackwell	It means that we make our instruction relevant to the students we work with or that we try to include things that the children
Blue	Culture would mean what the students are used to and relevant would mean if I use that to teach. I do in here. For example, people are talking about Black History Month. The other day I said, "I had better do something to recognize that it is Black History month. The reason I said this is because we do Black History in here all of the time. I don't separate it. I know I need to separate it now, because everyone in the school is talking about it, and I want my students to do what everyone else in the school is doing. But I don't believe in separating it out. I try to do things in here that my students can relate to. I try to understand them, and I want them to understand me. That is why I bring in all of the photo albums and stuff, and I let them bring theirs.
Bowman	I do that in my room. We don't only talk about it. Like I said, I have some Hispanic children in my room and I might talk to them and ask them how you say good morning in your language and stuff like that. We do something called, Christmas Around the World. So we touch on German, Italian and Spanish. And time and time again, I might bring in something like this is from Mexico. I put out wooden shoes, you know, something the children can relate to. I have African American books, lots of them. I asked the students what is special about February, and they finally realized that it is African American history month. And we talk not just about Martin Luther King, but we talk about others too like George Washington Carver.
Brooks	I think that would be providing things that will affect all of the students. I try to provide instruction that can relate to my Hispanic students and my African American students. I have a good book; Little Red Riding Hood is not White. My parents bought it for me. I go to the library all of the time and get books for my students.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

<p>What role does your African American students' social background play in their learning? How do you know this or what informs our thinking about this?</p> <p>Mark Elementary School</p>	
Participant	Response
May	It makes a very big difference because for number one, it is harder to get them interested and get the parents involved. The children have an interest, and if we can get the parents interested, it would make a big difference. A lot of my students don't really have the parental support, and I found out, too, that the parents just don't really know what to do and how to do what the children are doing. It is so important to keep those parents informed on what is going on and what we are trying to do and show them how they can help.
Michelangelo	I think it plays. I don't necessarily think that it is a racial issue; I think it is a socioeconomic issue. I work with kids who are less fortunate than many others and the drive for school is not always there but I couldn't call that a Black/White issues. I believe that the things that are affecting my students the most are issues associated with low expectations because expectations are not necessarily at home. School for some parents isn't much of a priority. It isn't so much that the parents don't care or that the parents don't love their kids; it's just that it's not seen as a priority, so I don't think it is a racial issue. I just think that these parents don't have an education themselves, and schooling is just something very new and very different.
Michaels	It makes a difference in their learning.
Mitchell	I definitely think that knowing where the child is coming from will help the teacher to better understand problems the child might have when he comes into the classroom. I have tried to share with teachers that maybe have students after me. I might say that this issue is going on at home. For example, Grandfather wants the child to stay with him because Mom can't control the child. So the things that he tries at home, he will try here. Many times Caucasian teachers will have the feeling that if Mrs. Mitchell did it, I know I can handle it too. But many of these teachers don't understand that kids come to school with a different image, and if you speak to many of their parents, you need to know that the parents think differently about African American and White teachers. Some of my kids even make the mistake of calling me Mama when they are talking to me. I can guarantee you that there isn't a White teacher here who will tell you that an African American student accidentally called them Mama. Because I tell these kids all of the time, I am your Mama. You know, when you are away from Mom, I am your mama. But I think many of them don't get to know them because maybe they feel uncomfortable, maybe, and you probably have some parents who will look at them in a different aspect like you are trying to be in my business. Whereas with me being Black they say, oh, she is just trying to get to know us better.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

<p>What role does your African American students' social background play in their learning? How do you know this or what informs our thinking about this?</p> <p>Mark Elementary School</p>	
Participant	Response
Montgomery	I knowing where they come from is important, but it shouldn't make you expect less from them. I always think about the teachers who gave me a chance in life.
Morris	I definitely think that knowing where the child is coming from will help the teacher to better understand problems the child might have when they come into the classroom. I have tried to share.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What role does your African American students' social background play in their learning? How do you know this or what informs our thinking about this?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	My African American students' social background does play a part in their learning. But I can honestly say that in this classroom my children do their homework. My parents will write me little notes when there is something that the children don't understand, and I help them. My homework is designed to help the children at home.
Berry	I think it affects their learning very much. Just like I just said, the children who have parents to help them always do better.
Blackwell	I definitely think that knowing where this child is coming from will help the teacher better understand problems the child might have when they come into the classroom.
Blue	I think single parents don't have time to help their children and this keeps the children behind. The parents are so busy working that they don't bring their homework in that they should have done. This is the reason that I give them things that they can do on their own since I know they don't have help at home.
Bowman	Yes I do.
Brooks	Yes I do.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	This probably started a long time ago because of the prior pre or misjudgments of what we could and couldn't do and what we were not supposed to be able to do.
Michelangelo	I wish I knew the answer; then I would be able to help out a little bit more. I think with my kids, a lot of it is, I am not trying to say that the parents don't care. I have a kid who is very much below grade level and I called mom and I called mom but she hasn't called back yet to set up a conference. I don't think mom doesn't care, I think, I don't even know what I think.
Michaels	It is expectations, definitely, that's what it is.
Mitchell	I will tell you what I have thought for years and I can't escape from it. It is expectations. I think, you know, I have the philosophy, and I tell the kids all of the time where you come from has nothing to do with where you go. And just because you come from a low socioeconomic background has nothing to do with it. When you come in this room you are given all of the privileges of any other person. I am going to teach you with all I got, and I don't care if you don't want me to, I am going to be there teaching you and we are going to get the work done. I will tell them that it also up to them and that they have to put forth some effort too. I never say they can't. Some teachers put on airs or the attitude that they can't because they are looking at where they came from.
Montgomery	Teacher expectations. Too many teachers think that African American students can't learn.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Morris	<p>You kind of wonder after all of these years, don't you? I am looking at a bigger picture than just my classroom. I think we need to get to what society expects and not just what the parents expect in society. You look at the whole socio- economic standard, from people who live in homeless shelters all the way to the people from the highest class. There is still a huge number who come to school without the background they need to help them succeed. We are talking about the necessities in life. I am not sure that people are equipped to deal with academics until they have what they need to live everyday. I guess we thought integration was going to take care of that, and that was so naïve because we haven't solved the economic issues that so many people have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. And if Mom is going to work all day and Dad's not at home, out of the picture, part-time out of the picture or on the weekend, it just makes it that much harder for Mom to cope. Kid gets home from school; we hope he has done his homework; he hasn't had a chance to participate in anything other than a daycare after school; he has something like sports that is organized, all of that is dependent on whether or not mother has to work. It is a very complex issue. I don't think there is a simple answer to this. And I think that you certainly won't see a gap here at Mark. I have a couple of people who are functioning lower than I would like to see them function, but there is not simple answer.</p>

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	I don't think those statistics include all and I would say that maybe one reason is that the population has grown a lot. I say over the past 15 to 20 years. A lot of the children in school today are African American. And I think the population of African Americans has increased, and I think that the ratio is down with white students. I went to a conference in the Pinehurst area, and there was an excellent speaker there who was doing research on this topic from Chapel Hill. He showed us statistics on how the population of African Americans in schools was growing. There are probably more African Americans today to teach and that is probably the reason why.
Berry	Basically I think the major difference between White and African American students is that there is a larger percentage of African American parents who don't teach their children the basics. Many of them are, but there is a large percent who do not teach their children the basics like manners and your basic ABCs. They are relying on the schools to do it and that is the reason why. Because we can do some things but the parents have to do their parts.
Blackwell	I think it is expectations. Remember what I shared about when I first came to this school and I made an assumption about the African American students? I think a lot of teachers do the same thing.
Blue	It is because of the way that the world is, the single parents. Most of our African American students have single parents, and they can't give the students the support they need and sometimes, we don't even know how to work with these students.
Bowman	Personally, I don't think White teachers insist that African Americans do their best like I do. I always insist. Like when we are doing a paper and pencil activity, I will make my students do the activity over if it isn't their best. I don't accept work that is not their best. I tell the students that first of all, they have to do it over for their satisfaction. Number two, they do it over for me, their teacher, and number three, they do it over for their parents. But I want them to know that ultimately they are the person that they should try to please first and foremost.
Brooks	I don't know what it is. It seems like they push and they have a lot more parental involvement. Our African American parents are out working I think with one or two jobs. I don't think their influence at home is as strong as those outside influences.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How do you think African Americans are portrayed on television and popular culture or in the media? Have you found these portrayals accurate based on your knowledge of your students? How so, how not?

Mark Elementary School

Participant	Response
May	I don't need to say this, but it is like a joke. A lot of times its just a joke with the dancing and the music. People think that that is the way that you make your money, or that is the way you are supposed to be. I don't mind the family shows that portrays a family, but a lot of the stuff is not realistic. They are not accurate; they are not accurate at all.
Michelangelo	It depends on what channel we are watching. I think that I would say that depending upon what you are watching that some things are accurate and some of it is not. And I think that sometimes the media hinders things like my kids are very media-oriented. I think it hinders regardless of race, creed or gender, because today there is a lot more shown on television than there used to be, and I think that also today too many children nowadays are watching more television. I know that I used to watch it growing up and I think kids are seeing a lot of grown up stuff too early on, and I think it is something along that line. I am talking about kids in general. When I went to college, I worked with mountain children and it was the same thing. I know kids are growing up very fast.
Michaels	Definitely negative! When it is so called accurate there still are underlining factors that they don't show. Not to say that that is justified or anything. For instance like the Cosby thing, people always carry on about how he lived in a different world. Working here at Mark keeps it real for me. There are African Americans on television as far as the language; I don't think they put on there how we really communicate as a people, because sometimes it is not the very best. The Cosby Show showed that they made it but they failed to show why the mother was not there working, trying to make it day-to-day or why she wasn't always there when they got home from school. The Cosby Show left some pieces out. It didn't show how they arrived or had gotten where they were. It leaves some pieces out. I constantly argue that fact. . I think some of the teachers here are affected by what they see in the media.
Mitchell	We are our own worst enemy sometimes, because when I look at some of the rap music and some of the words that are being used for our females, it is terrible. I told my daughter that I dare her to use a penny of the money that I would ever make to go out and buy that stuff. In words she would be backing a song that is calling ladies out of their names. And in some incidences, we are our own worst enemy, because we do it. A principal once said to me that she couldn't believe that all of my low children ended up being my best kids. Do you know what bothers me more than anything else in the world? It is when a teacher tries to act Black. It is just so degrading.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How do you think African Americans are portrayed on television and popular culture or in the media? Have you found these portrayals accurate based on your knowledge of your students? How so, how not?

Mark Elementary School

Participant	Response
Montgomery	I think it is unrealistic-Television could really be used to help educators educate children, but instead it makes things worse.
Morris	I think too often we are appealing to the lowest common denominator of our culture, and it just gets bigger than for African Americans. I think we have decided on a different kind of humor. We don't see the television we saw in the fifties and sixties. We have gotten the most horrible kinds of things that we don't want our children to watch, and they are on television during the hours when children are still up. And I think it is African Americans, and it is everybody. We don't appeal to the highest level of our intellectual ability. I am sure that some of it is accurate and no matter whether we are looking at a sitcom that shows people in a very typical form or like some people would say that the Cosby Show, people were not very typical because they stereotyped in the other direction.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How do you think African Americans are portrayed on television and popular culture or in the media? Have you found these portrayals accurate based on your knowledge of your students? How so, how not?

Blackmon Elementary School

Participant	Response
<hr/>	
Bell	I think that it has improved a lot and I think it is accurate today. It has improved a lot.
Berry	I think television shows them as being not smart and loving money. I don't think it is a true portrayal.
Blackwell	I think pop culture, and the media is teaching some of my students how to act. The African American students who don't have the supervision come in here sometimes repeating some of the words they have heard on television or by listening to rap music. Some teachers really think that all African Americans are like that. I really do think that the media helps to create some of the stereotypes, and it hurts us. Is it accurate? I will have to answer that yes and no. No for the children who have parents that teach them a better way and yes for the students who watch and listen to that stuff and start emulating it. It is almost like the chicken and the egg concept.
Blue	I think it is just comical. It is a shame, and I think it is teaching our students how to act. For those children who spend all of their time watching television, they are learning how to act and they bring that behavior into the classroom. I think it is awful. I think that this is why some of the things on television are accurate. The children learn all of those words and watch all of that stuff and bring it into the classroom. I think it is just terrible.
Bowman	I do not watch much television so it is difficult for me to answer this question. I do know about the Cosby Show, and I think it is accurate for some African American families.
Brooks	I think a lot of the shows are accurate. My kids will tell me about That's So Raven so I will try to watch it. I think they are accurate for some of my students, but not for others. I also think they are teaching my students how to act like what they see on television.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How many of your African American students do you think will score 4s on the EOG?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	Oh, I have to be confident! In math, they are zooming. Let's see, out of 14 and based on where they are now, their abilities, foundations and everything, I would say probably nine out of this 14 and the others will be very close to making 4s, at least 3s.
Michelangelo	I think with the right work, I can get four out of 17.
Michaels	Probably 3
Mitchell	Out of my twenty, possibly 5. But my plan is that all of them will make it.
Montgomery	I feel confident that all of the children will pass and we will have a high number of fours too.
Morris	Probably 2 and that will be pushing it.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

How many of your African American students do you think will score 4s on the EOG?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	I think I will have two out of 23.
Berry	I would say four.
Blackwell	I would have to say five out of my 20.
Blue	I will have to say that all of my African American students will make 4s.
Bowman	All of them.
Brooks	I hope at least three fourths of them.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Is it unusual for African American students to be the top students in a classroom? Why or why not?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	Not unusual, not unusual at all. It doesn't happen often, but it is not unusual. I think it doesn't always happen because the expectations aren't always high and rather than saying they expect all the students to reach high expectations, they are used to saying, "Johnny may get there but I don't know."
Michelangelo	All of my top students are African American. It is not unusual at all!
Michaels	No, I don't think it is unusual.
Mitchell	Yes, at this school. The immersion teachers have their own children enrolled here. And rules keep changing to cater them. I remember at the beginning of the school year, I wish I could find the email that came out that stated that kids were not allowed on workdays at the school and every workday, I guarantee you, you don't see any of the traditional teachers' kids in the school, but if you walk around today, you will see some of the immersion teachers' children.
Montgomery	Of course not!
Morris	Not really. Remember the two students that I mentioned? Well, the young lady is definitely the top student in reading. She is also the best writer I have. I mean she writes with details and elaboration.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

Is it unusual for African American students to be the top students in a classroom? Why or why not?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	No, I don't think so.
Berry	The past two years, my top students were African American. When I was a student it was unusual. I don't know why, maybe a lot of it had to do with the teachers' perceptions, and a lot of it could have had something to do with the shape that the African Americans were in.
Blackwell	No, there are some capable African American children.
Blue	No, not any more. It used to be, but I think teachers are learning that they have to work with the African American students.
Bowman	Oh, no, no, no! Because we have lots of students who are very capable, as well as the White race and other groups of people.
Brooks	No, I think they can definitely be there. We have some really strong students, and I have been really impressed this year. I have a student reading. But I think his mom stays at home, and she works with him at home. I know that.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What conditions cause your African American students to achieve at high rates?	
Mark Elementary School	
Participant	Response
May	The number one thing is high expectations. Letting them know that they can, and one of my things is that I always say whenever they say this is too hard, I tell them to just try.
Michelangelo	I tell them everyday that I am going to check on them down the road. I tell that that I expect them to do things. My high expectations influences them will do it. There is not enough credit given to expectations. I think kids always rise to the expectations.
Michaels	Again, it is the expectations!
Mitchell	Number one, it is the high expectations that I have for all of my children; letting them know that they can.
Montgomery	When the teacher treats the children with respect and set high goals for them. The teacher also helps the students to achieve those goals.
Morris	Parental support. This helps the African American students succeed.

Table 7—Cont'd

Participant Interview Responses

What conditions cause your African American students to achieve at high rates?	
Blackmon Elementary School	
Participant	Response
Bell	Praise and feeling success. Feeling wanted and feeling loved. I think that is the key right there. You got to love these children, no matter what. You can come in my room and ask my students about race, and they will tell you that Mrs. Bell doesn't talk about race in here because we are all alike.
Berry	Good home environment and good relationships with the teachers. A relationship where they are not necessarily your friend but a relationship where they respect you and they have fun and stuff like that.
Blackwell	It is high expectations and making sure that they get the help that they need to succeed.
Blue	When they have lots of support at home.
Bowman	Support is number one and stability. And they need routines, and we have to be consistent.
Brooks	Parent support and parental involvement in the class. The parents who ask what are you doing today. I like the ones who ask those questions. I think the children who get this support do better.

The teachers from the two schools in this study face the same problems as described above. Mark Elementary had approximately three White students out of approximately 315 children in the traditional program. Blackmon on the other hand had a student body that was 70% African American.

The interview data showed that the teachers at Mark and Blackmon had similar answers to many of the questions asked. For example, most teachers stated that they had gotten to know their students through one on one discussions, “getting to know you” activities and by talking to the parents. Few teachers overall said that they formed their opinions by talking to the previous teachers. Although the teachers gave me similar responses, it was evident that they had different definitions for many of the phrases. For instance, a few teachers at Blackmon said that they had high expectations for their students, yet their answers to other questions might lead one to believe that their definition of having high expectations meant that they expected the students and their parents to do the work that they assigned.

Although there were some clear differences in the overall responses from the teachers at Mark and the teachers at Blackmon, all teachers were able to “talk the talk.” I must point out that I am in no way implying that the participants were insincere in their responses or that they were giving me answers that they thought I wanted to hear. Teachers are experts at speaking in education jargon, and they are quick to respond in the catch phrase of the day. All participants felt that they were good, culturally sensitive teachers (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). They

felt that they planned lessons and activities that their students could relate to, based on the different cultures in their classrooms.

Observations

I observed in each of the participant's classrooms at least two times. On the first visit, I looked at the classroom environment. I also looked at the work displayed throughout the room and determined if the work was quality work based on the grade level standards and how the work was completed. For example, if the work was a "fill in the blanks" worksheet, I did not count it as "quality work." I also did not consider work to be quality if it was displayed with errors without correction (misspelled words, and missing punctuation). In addition, I listened to the level of questioning techniques used by the teachers. For instance, I listened to see if the teacher asked the students all low level questions or questions that caused the students to think and give more than one word responses. During my second visit, I observed teacher/student interaction. I watched to see how many students were called on for academic purposes as opposed to being called down for discipline reasons. Room arrangement was also a consideration. I wanted to know if the desks were arranged so that the students could engage in dialogue with each other or if the teacher felt that she couldn't control the students unless they were in straight rows (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ferguson, 2001). The charts below show the teachers at both schools who had their desks arranged in a fashion so that the children could work in collaborative pairs. They also show whether or not they had pictures of African

Americans displayed in the classroom. I also examined the quality of work that was given to the students. The charts show the teachers who offered the students work other than worksheets and whole group assignments.

Table 8

Mark Elementary Classroom Environment

Teacher	Pictures of African Americans on Walls and Bulletin Boards	Quality Work Displayed	Desks Arranged for Group Work and Collaboration
May	None	Worksheets, and some writing	Yes
Michelangelo	Two commercial cutouts	Worksheets, writing, math, art	Yes
Michaels	None	Worksheets, writing, math	Yes
Mitchell	Pictures of famous African Americans	Handwriting, math assignments, art work.	Yes
Montgomery	None	Handwriting, math assignments, art work.	Yes
Morris	Pictures and projects that had been done by the students about famous African Americans.	Handwriting, math assignments, art work, projects	Yes

Walking the Talk: Discussion about the Observation Data

For the period of this study, I was able to visit the classrooms of the participants and notice things that I had never noticed before as a building

Table 9***Blackmon Elementary Classroom Environment***

Teacher	Pictures of African Americans on Walls and Bulletin Boards	Quality Work Displayed	Desks Arranged for Group Work and Collaboration
Bell	None	Worksheets	No
Berry	None	Worksheets	No
Blackwell	None	Worksheets, handwriting assignments, art and special projects.	Yes
Blue	Two posters	Worksheets	No
Bowman	Pictures of famous African Americans.	Worksheets, handwriting assignments, art and special projects.	Yes
Brooks	None	Worksheets	No

Table 10***Mark Elementary Teacher/Student Interaction***

Teacher	Number of African American Students Called on for Academic Responses	Number of African American Students Called on for Discipline or Correction	Desks Arranged for Group Work and Collaboration
May	5	0	Yes
Michelangelo	0 (whole group)	2	Yes
Michaels	3	0	No
Mitchell	6	0	Yes
Montgomery	3	0	Yes
Morris	1	5	Yes

Table 11***Blackmon Elementary Teacher/Student Interaction***

Teacher	Number of African American Students Called on for Academic Responses	Number of African American Students Called on for Discipline or Correction	Desks Arranged for Group Work and Collaboration
Bell	0 (whole group)	3	No
Berry	0	7	No
Blackwell	6	0	Yes
Blue	0 (whole group)	3	No
Bowman	3	0	Yes
Brooks	0	5	Yes

principal or as the school's Instructional Improvement Officer. Participating in this project made me more aware of the teacher's actions as well as the classroom surroundings. Unfortunately, I often observed what Kailin (2002) referred to as "good teachers doing bad things." For example, during an observation session at Blackmon, I noticed that Mrs. Brooks had all of her African American students grouped together for an activity. I also noticed that the children in the group were given easier assignments, although a few of the students appeared bored with the easy assignment. In addition, I was made aware of the fact that both African American and White teachers can view cultural differences as stumbling blocks (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Obidah & Teel, 2001). This was more apparent in the classrooms at Blackmon, however, a few teachers at Mark also engaged in some

practices that were not always in the best interest of the students. For example, Mrs. Michaels got ready to discuss a child with me in the presence of the child.

I was made aware during the observations that teachers do not always do what they say they do or “walk the talk.” At both schools, there was a lack of African American posters and pictures of famous African American leaders displayed on the classroom walls (Taylor, 1999). This was apparent even though all teachers stated that they made sure that their lessons were culturally relevant. The work that was displayed in many classrooms was lower level thinking activities such as “fill in the blank” worksheet and carbon copy art projects. Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Blackwell, and Mrs. Bowman did have final drafts of stories posted in their “writing centers.”

The teachers at Mark took pride in handling their own discipline problems. Mrs. Mitchell bragged that she didn't have any:

I don't have any discipline problems. My kids know what I expect of them and they perform accordingly. I can leave my classroom, go to the bathroom and come and my kids will still be doing what they are supposed to do. I have never had any problems controlling these kids.

All teachers at Blackmon except for Mr. Berry and Mrs. Brooks seemed to have good classroom management skills. Mr. Berry admitted that he had struggled during his first year, but quickly commented that he had made great improvements. Mrs. Brooks implied that her assistant was solely responsible for keeping her students in shape:

I am too nice to the kids which make it hard for me to control them. I think it is because they are used to being yelled at and I just can't do it. My assistant can do it and they seem to listen to her fine. I know I need to get a little tougher with them but I just have a hard time doing it.

Mrs. Brook's statements about classroom management were consistent with the other answers she gave to the interview questions. It seemed that she felt that since her assistant was African American that she could control the African American students better.

Focus Group Data

Focus group discussions were held at both elementary sites. These sessions allowed the participants to express their points of view in group settings (Villard, 2003). The focus group interviews gave the teachers an opportunity to discuss teacher expectations and the sensitive issues of racial biases, stereotypes and teaching. In order to code the reactions to the questions, I determined whether or not the responses were statements of high expectations or low expectations based on whether or not the teacher answered in a way that affirmed the students' capabilities or in a manner that rejected the students' capabilities. In addition, I decided whether the statements could be associated with stereotypes and popular culture information or whether or not the statements were based on prior knowledge of the students. Below are the data gathered from pictures shown to teachers from both schools. For example, I listed the response of a teacher from Mark and Blackmon on the same pictures although the focus group discussions were held separately at each school.

Table 12***Expectations/Sources of Expectations***

Teacher	Expectations (High or Low)	School	Sources of Expectations
Berry	"I know the child with the two parent family can succeed better because the child will have help at home. The child with the single parent will struggle in school." (low)	Blackmon Elementary	"The children in our society who come from single parent families don't have books at home and school is not important to them."
Mitchell	"I think the child in the picture with the man can succeed like the child in the picture with two parents." (high)	Mark Elementary	"I had students from single parent homes before and they did extremely well. Many single parents give their children lots of attention."
Bell	"I don't think that because a student looks like that the he can't learn." (high)	Blackmon Elementary	"I have had some students surprise me and do better than I thought."
May	"I have to be honest and admit that I have prejudged some of my student because of the way they look. I have also locked my car doors when I saw an African American man who looked like that." (low)	Mark Elementary	"It is embarrassing to admit that because I am African American and I realize that even I am influenced by the media. That young man on that picture could be my son."
Blackwell	"There are a lot of teachers today who think all African American students are incapable of doing good work." (low)	Blackmon Elementary	"They look at how African Americans are portrayed on television and how the rap stars looks and they lower their expectations."
Michelangelo	"I don't think teachers at our school judge students by they way they dress. That young man looks like a rap star, but a lot of rap stars have college degrees." (high)	Mark Elementary	"I grew up in the Washington DC area and I was around all types of people. I know that you can't judge a person by the way that person looks or dresses."
Blue	"Our children would do better if they had some guidance at home. That person probably doesn't have any guidance." (low)	Blackmon Elementary	"If a parent helps a child with their homework, then they can learn. I have seen it with my students. If they come to school with help, they do better."
Montgomery	"It doesn't matter what a student's home life is. Sure they would do better if they had help at home, but I try to	Mark Elementary	"I grew up in an area that many people frowned upon. I am thankful that I had teachers who believed

	empower them to learn on their own. I teach them strategies that will help them be successful." (high)		in me and helped me to succeed."
Bowman	"That girl looks like she would be more prone to being a discipline problem which would make it harder for her to learn" (low)	Blackmon Elementary	"I chose her over the other girl because she is dressed more hip and the other girl is more conservative."
Morris	"Both girls are probably smart. In fact, the one dressed flashier is probably smarter than the other one. If she were in my class, I would have to keep her challenged." (high)	Mark Elementary	"Many times, it is the students who are the most outgoing that are the smartest. We as teachers have to make sure that we provide lessons that will interest them."
Brooks	"I think young man in the shirt and tie would be more likely to attend college."	Blackmon Elementary	"He just looks like he is more of a student than the other one."
Michaels	"Although the young man with all of the bling around his neck is probably capable, the one in the shirt and tie will probably be more likely to attend college based on the image he is projecting." (high/low)	Mark Elementary	"He doesn't look like a rap star and unfortunately he will be judged by the way he looks in our society."

Digging from Within: Discussion of Focus Group Data

Since I supervise the principals at both schools in this study, I was a little uneasy about conducting focus group discussions. I was fearful that the teachers would be silenced by my position of power. I had failed to remember teachers are in an ideal position to put issues on the table in order to initiate true discussions (Delpit, 1995). The data from the focus group represent honest feelings and thought provoking responses. Through this activity, the participants were able to admit openly in their groups that they might have biases (Meier, 2002).

The answers in the chart represent some general comments given to the focus group questions (see Appendix). Focus group data that were collected

from Mark Elementary had more expectations statements and responses that resulted from their direct knowledge of their students than the data collected from teachers at Blackmon. All participants except Michelangelo admitted that the students who were dressed more conservatively would have an easier time in school. The teachers were also aware of the fact that people can form negative opinions of others based on stereotypes and popular culture based information.

CHAPTER V

WITHIN CASE ANALYSIS

My first task in analysis was to understand each teacher as an individual with respect to my research questions. It was my goal not only to determine their feelings and thoughts, but to analyze where these ideas originated. In this chapter, I will present case studies on each of the teachers.

Mark Elementary School Participants

Mrs. May

Mrs. May grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina. Over her youth, she was exposed to many educators. Her mother taught at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro. This afforded her the opportunity of spending many days on the college campus. Her cousins, aunts and uncles were also teachers. They taught in the public schools that Mrs. May attended as a child. It was through this strong education background that Mrs. May felt that she was destined to become a teacher.

Although my family thought I was going to be a teacher, I was determined to do something different. I still wanted to help people, but I didn't want to be a teacher. I decided that I could help people by becoming a nurse. Little did I know that I would end up in the profession that I was determined to avoid.

After completing two years of college, Mrs. May discovered that she had to wait a year before she was officially accepted in the nursing school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. It was at this time in her life that she started reevaluating her career choice.

I wasn't sure at that point if I really wanted to be a nurse. I was beginning to wonder at that time if I really wanted to continue my studies in this field. So I took a break from college and decided to get a job.

While Mrs. May was on hiatus from college, she decided to work at Mark Elementary as a kindergarten teacher assistant. She found the job rewarding and fulfilling.

I loved working in that kindergarten class. It brought me so much pleasure and joy to see the children learn and grow. I hated to admit it to my family but I knew I had to become a teacher. I could no longer run from the profession.

While working as a teacher assistant at Mark, Mrs. May worked with a lady who she referred to as a teacher "who saw the potential in all of the students in the classroom." She stated that the teacher that she worked with did not look at where the students came from, but instead "treated them as if they were the smartest and richest children in the world." This early experience in education helped shape Mrs. May's views on the students at Mark. Throughout the interview process, it appeared to me that her responses were based on her having high expectations for her students. This echoed Good's (1987) observation that good teachers do not lower their expectations because of the

race, ethnicity, or socio-economic levels of their students. When I asked her questions about pop culture and stereotypes, she stated that she tried hard not to be influenced by the negative images in the media. During the focus group discussion, she said,

There are times when I know that I am being influenced by the negative stereotypes of African Americans, and I feel ashamed. I was looking at a young man the other day that had a rag on his head and the big baggy pants. I found myself getting negative thoughts about him and I had to stop. You see, I have a son, and I would hate for someone to feel that way about him. I would also hate for someone to lower their expectations about him because of the way he looks. It scares me when I see teachers doing that, and it could be because I have a son of my own.

The walls in Mrs. May's classroom were lined with many colorful posters, along with many examples of student work under labels such as "Super Work." There was a large bear on her door holding a welcome sign, and she had taught her students to come up and greet visitors as they entered the classroom. These things made the classroom seem very inviting to me, and when I talked to students about Mrs. May, they said things like, "I like my class," or "Mrs. May does fun things with us." It was also hard to tell which students were the high achievers and which were the low achievers, as she frequently called on all students and validated their answers with cheers and reinforcement. She bragged about how smart all of them were and called me over to listen to a small group read. She had high expectations for all of her students and it was evident not only in her words, but also in her actions (Clarken, 1995). She helped the

students to be successful by giving them cues and reinforcements whenever they needed them.

Mrs. May's classroom was set up to meet the individual students' learning styles, an important aspect of an inviting classroom as articulated by Hale-Benson (1986). Learning centers were set up to help the students master the skills she had taught. For example, if she was working on the concept of "before and after," the students were able to do hands on math activities to reinforce the skill; they could do a movement activity, or they could sit at their desks and "write" a kindergarten story. On the days that I observed her classroom, the students were always actively involved in their learning. There was no evidence that Mrs. May was creating negative stereotypes of any of her students.

Ms. Michelangelo

Ms. Michelangelo left her home in Washington, D.C., to attend college at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. Leaving the urban city of Washington, D.C. to attend school in the rural mountain region was quite a shock for Ms. Michelangelo.

I grew up in the DC area around all cultures of people, so when I started doing my student teaching in an all White school, I was shocked. Although I am White myself, I couldn't believe that there were still schools in the United States that were all White. I was also shocked to see that there weren't many, if any, African Americans in the town where I did my student teaching. I grew up with and went to school with African Americans and kids from all races. I had students from Africa and China and other places, too, in my graduating class.

Ms. Michelangelo's strong senses of moral purpose led her to the teaching profession. She wanted to be a teacher so that she could make a difference in the world.

When I went to college, I knew that I wanted to do something that would make a difference in the world. Being an educator is the best vehicle to use in making the world a better place for all. I have had lots of experiences and I want to share those experiences with my kids.

Being a first-year teacher, Ms. Michelangelo appeared to struggle with blending theory with practice. Although she had many ideas and opinions, while observing in her classroom on many occasions, I could tell that she was still trying to find the best way to manage her class. Even though she prepared lessons to meet the individual needs of the students in her classroom, at times, the noise level was so high that many students got off task, and her objectives of the lesson was not accomplished. It was evident, however, that she respected her students, and her students respected her in turn. During one of the observation periods, Ms. Michelangelo was doing an activity where she had the students report on their "Icons." The assignment had been given a few weeks prior to the group sharing. The students got loud as they were transitioning between activities, and immediately a student said, "Be quiet, please, Ms. Michelangelo is talking." It was clear that the students knew what Ms. Michelangelo expected of them. She also expected them to do their best. Whenever she asked them questions, she probed them and asked other questions that

helped them think and problem solve the answers. No students were held to different standards.

Ms. Michelangelo was the youngest teacher in this study. In spite of the fact that she did her student teaching in an all White school, she appeared to be quite comfortable working at Mark with the large percentage of African American students. This might be due to her schooling experience. Throughout the study, she frequently reminded me of the fact that she was “used to being around African Americans.”

I am used to being around African Americans. I grew up where some of my best friends were African Americans. I used to go to their homes and they used to come to mine. I don't have a problem teaching at Mark. In fact, I like it better than teaching in that school in the mountains because that is not the real world, and they are missing so much.

Ms. Michelangelo admitted that she at times gets influenced by the negative messages and stereotypes of African Americans in the media.

I have to admit that I wonder sometimes if it is like the chicken and egg theory. I wonder if the media is teaching our young children how to act or if some of the ideas come from reality. I do work hard not to put everybody in the same box. Some of the stuff now is just so bad. When I was doing my famous icon assignment, I wouldn't let my students choose rap stars. They need positive role models.

Ms. Michelangelo appeared to be comfortable with the differences between herself and her students, a characteristic that Harmon (2002) suggests is an important trait for teachers of African American students. She felt that she had

knowledge of African Americans and that it was one of the reasons for her success at Mark.

Mrs. Michaels

Mrs. Michaels' security as a child was shaken when her parents separated, and she and her mother left their nice home in South Carolina to live with her grandparents in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mrs. Michaels enjoyed living with her grandparents, but when her mother decided to move to Greensboro, North Carolina, they were forced to live in the same government assisted apartments that the Mark students live in.

I can relate to these students. I know how they think and feel. I went from living in a secure situation into an environment where my mom had to struggle to make ends meet. I lived in this environment in middle and high school. I also lived there while I was doing my student teaching. So you see, I feel like I was placed here to teach for a reason. I am living proof that you can overcome your circumstances.

Although Mrs. Michaels did not grow up around her father, she attributed an interaction with him as the reason she became a teacher. After discovering at a young age that he could not read, Mrs. Michaels started reading for her father. After many reading sessions, she started to teach him.

I would sit down with him and read. Then I started asking him to read to me what I had read to him. I would say, "Tell me that word," and he would tell me. It made me feel so good to be able to teach him. I knew then and there that I wanted to be a teacher.

Mrs. Michaels started her education career as an elementary classroom teacher. Like the experience with her father, she was intrigued by the fact that she could teach children to read. It was not long after her first three years of teaching that she was back in college working on a master's degree in reading. Mrs. Michaels became a Reading Recovery teacher after receiving her reading certification. In this new role, she worked with struggling, low income, predominantly African American students. The success of the Reading Recovery program was measured by how many students showed expected growth. Mrs. Michaels had to push her students hard in order for them to achieve the goals of the program.

I had high expectations for my Reading Recovery students and they always did well. It felt good to watch them develop into good readers. It also felt good when they went way beyond the level that was set as their bar of achievement.

Mrs. Michaels was a Reading Recovery teacher when she was assigned to Mark Elementary. She stayed in that position until the school district no longer adopted the program. Her next role at Mark was the Title I reading teacher. During district wide budget cuts, Mark lost Title I reading teacher funding. No longer able to teach reading all day, Mrs. Michaels asked her principal if she could teach first grade.

Although it had been a long time since I had been a classroom teacher, I wanted to teach first grade because of the importance of reading at that grade level. I am able to use a lot of the reading strategies I used with my reading students in first grade.

Mrs. Michaels grew up in the neighborhood that the students at Mark lived in. She stated that she knew her students and that she understood what they were going through based on her own experiences of living in poverty. Even though Mrs. Michaels had high expectations for her students and that she worked hard to help them achieve, at times, as noted by Steele (2003), she viewed them through the lens of negative stereotypes. In a discussion on learning styles, Mrs. Michaels said that the students didn't come from "traditional families with mothers and fathers," but that they had lots of extended families living in their households. When I asked her further about this, she was only able to give examples of a few students in her class, which means that all of her children did not fit into this category.

Mrs. Michaels felt that popular culture based information and negative stereotypes have hurt the education of African American students.

It makes me mad to see how we are portrayed on television and in the media. It is just terrible. The bad part about it is it makes people get a wrong impression of us. That is one of the reasons that there is an achievement gap in our schools. Many teachers think we are stupid and dumb because they have seen us that way in the media. It just makes me mad.

Mrs. Mitchell

Mrs. Mitchell grew up in a close-knit family. All of her relatives lived close to each other. She said that her aunt, who lived down the street, taught her how to be a teacher.

My favorite aunt was a teacher, and she lived down the street from us. She made me into a teacher. She would always call on me to be the lead in our church plays and she taught me how to recite poetry by pronouncing each word clearly. She gave me lots of responsibility, and I loved every minute of it.

Mrs. Mitchell took pride in being a teacher. She also took pride in the fact that each year all of her students passed the end of grade test and that none of her students ever ended up in the principal's office. As articulated by Clarken (1995), she expected her students to do well, and she showed them that she believed in them. It was apparent during my visits to her classroom that Mrs. Mitchell judged her students as being high achievers, and they performed accordingly.

Mrs. Mitchell did numerous activities and used several strategies to get to know her students. She made home visits on a weekly basis, and she trained her parents to become volunteers as they were frequent visitors in her room. She also continued to work with her students long after they left her classroom. This served her well at the school, because she was known in the community as a teacher who cared.

I can't walk across the street in the neighborhood without someone calling my name. Some of the students and parents I know, but some I don't know. Whenever I go on my weekly visits, I find myself helping parents who don't even have a child in my classroom. Sometimes it is hard for me to make my visits in less than two hours because people just like to talk to me.

Mrs. Mitchell's first teaching assignment was at Mark. Because she has commuted for over twenty years from a neighboring town, a few years ago after the school districts merged, she asked for a transfer in order to teach closer to home. After spending two years at a school in a middle and upper class neighborhood, Mrs. Mitchell found that she missed the students and families at Mark more than she could stand.

I feel that a good teacher is a good teacher and that she can teach anywhere but I think a school like Mark needs the best you have. When I left Mark, I was miserable. Although my students at the other school came in already knowing how to do stuff, teaching them wasn't as rewarding as teaching at Mark. I have to work much harder here, but I feel good knowing that I am helping our students. There is not an achievement gap here!

Mrs. Mitchell's students work together as one group. Upon visits to her classroom, I saw students engaged in cooperative learning activities, group projects and small group instruction. The students also worked helping one another learn a concept. Mrs. Mitchell engaged her students in many conversations through classroom discussions. On one visit, she introduced me to her class and then had each child tell me their name. After the student said his or her name, Mrs. Mitchell added something interesting about each child. After that visit, I was in church one Sunday and one of her students was visiting my church with a friend who was also a student at Mark. When the student saw me, he introduced me to his friend and his family in the same manner that Mrs. Mitchell had introduced him.

Mrs. Mitchell stated that her students often forget and call her “Mama.” This is yet another example of how connected she is to her students. Just as mothers have high expectations and aspirations for their children, Mrs. Mitchell has those same feelings for her students.

In my discussions with Mrs. Mitchell, she demonstrated knowledge of the history of minority populations, societal racism and the role of the community and family.

People don’t believe our children can do well. They think that because they are African American and poor that they are like the people they see on television-stupid and dumb. I tell my kids that we are going to show the world that they can achieve and that they can do well. I tell the parents the same thing and they work well with me.

Mrs. Montgomery

Mrs. Montgomery painted herself as a young white southern girl growing up in what she referred to as a “blue collar” neighborhood. She said both her parents worked, and she was often cared for by an aunt and by a special African American lady named, Isabel. She said she loved Isabel and that Isabel was a grandmother figure to her. Although she knew Isabel lived in much lower standard housing with outhouses, she never thought much of it at the time. She just remembered thinking, “I guess that is the way they live.” She also remembered that when she used to go downtown, the stores were separate. When she mentioned this fact, she seemed puzzled that nobody at the time seemed to think that it was wrong.

When Mrs. Montgomery started school, she realized that right around the corner from her street were poor white people, as well as some African Americans who lived better than Isabel, although not better than the poor Whites. The houses on Isabel's street were shacks and the African American homes near Mrs. Montgomery's street looked similar to Mrs. Montgomery's. She discovered that the Black students who lived near her also attended her school. She couldn't remember any disturbances or any unpleasant incidents. She stated,

The Black and White students got along. I don't remember anybody not getting along or causing any trouble. I think we had more problems with socioeconomic status than with race. I also learned when I was in high school how sheltered I had been when we started playing other teams in sports. The other schools that we played always put us down. We had Blacks and Whites on our team and we all got along. The other schools didn't. They were segregated. My mom and my dad taught my brother and me that we should look at the quality, character and expertise of people. I learned to value a person. I think that since my high school had more blacks and poor students in it than the other two high schools, our school was not considered a good school. It was a new school but some people didn't want to go there. At my high school there were also pockets of people who thought they were better than the rest because of their status in the community. We did have a few well off people or people who thought they were well off.

In 1968, Mrs. Montgomery saw a change in her community. She said that it was during this time that society changed. She felt that when people pushed to bring the races together, some of the people who had gotten along "turned into activists." She remembered coming home from college and worrying because of all of the riots. It wasn't until she became a teacher that she began to understand "the balancing of the races." She learned much from the workshops and special

courses on diversity, but she learned the most from a black teacher who became her mentor and friend. Mrs. Montgomery reflected on a time during this period,

I learned about diversity. I worked with a diverse faculty. I went to different communities and for the first time, I really started having dialogue with people who were different from me. What I will never forget is how my mentor and friend had been transferred from a segregated black school and sent to my school. I didn't have to leave my school. In spite of this, she was always positive and we became friends. I remember when she invited me to her home and I met her husband and children. I will never forget how she took the time to bake me a cake with lemon icing, my favorite. Those days taught me a lot.

Mrs. Montgomery was a classroom teacher who did not judge her students by the color of their skin or other characteristics other than intelligence. She stated that she had watched her African America mentor when she was a beginning teacher and had noticed how that individual had worked hard to meet her students' needs, no matter who they were.

I will never forget the good training that I got from her. My principal was just like her. He made all of us, Black teachers and White teachers work hard to make sure that our students were successful and they were. He had high expectations of us and we had high expectations of our students. I worked with children who might be referred to as "at risk" but we didn't see them that way. I had some good training.

Mrs. Montgomery 's experiences in grade school and during her first few years of teaching helped her discern the negative and positive images of African Americans in the media. My data correspond in most ways with Cortes (1995), Hall (1982), and Collins (2004b). Teachers can be affected by negative and positive images of African Americans in the media. Mrs. Montgomery considered

it extremely important for teachers to pattern themselves after strong mentors when working with African American children to avoid this problem, which the literature does not mention. She had been around African Americans enough to know that one member of the group should not be viewed as the entire group, which a problem that many teachers can face as is defined by Cross (1996).

Mrs. Morris

Mrs. Morris grew up north of Atlanta, Georgia. When she was in the ninth grade, her family moved to Charlotte, North Carolina. It was during that time that Mrs. Morris finally went to school with African American students. Prior to her move to Charlotte, her only experiences with African Americans were the experiences she had with her African American baby sitter. She also visited a disabled doctor as a child, and the caregiver for that lady was African American.

Mrs. Morris' education career just happened. Upon completing high school, she chose to attend a college where her aunt taught.

I ended up going to Appalachian and the primary reason that I became a teacher was because of my aunt was on staff at Appalachian in the physical science department. And she was a teacher there, and I originally started out as a chorus major. It's not like I said from my first days as a child that I was going to be a teacher, I think it just happened somewhere in the process of being in college while in that atmosphere.

One would not know that teaching was Mrs. Morris' "afterthought" career. Her classroom was inviting, and the students were actively engaged on each of my visits. There were signs that her lessons were designed with specific task outcomes, and the students knew what was expected of them. It was also hard to

determine which students were high achievers and which were low ones. She held all students to the same standard by expecting them to complete tasks, respond to her questions, and work collaboratively with others. Although Mrs. Morris had the same expectations, she knew that her students who lived in the government housing near the school faced a set of problems that students in other schools in the district did not face.

I have helped so many students at this school over the years. I have also helped their parents. For example, once I had a mom who didn't have a job and she was looking for something to do. I helped her enroll at the community college, and I made sure she had everything that she needed to be successful just like I did with her child.

Mrs. Morris viewed her students as individuals rather than an ethnic group. When I asked her questions about African American students, she kindly reminded me on each occasion that all students are different, no matter what color they are, and that she couldn't answer questions in "a blanket manner like that."

Mrs. Morris was the only teacher at Mark who stated that she might get to know her students by talking to their previous teachers. The other teachers rejected the idea, stating that it might give them a false understanding of their students' ability. Mrs. Morris also stated that some of the images of African Americans that are portrayed in the media are correct. She further stated that the African Americans on The Cosby Show were stereotyped in the other direction.

When I asked her to explain the Cosby comment, she stated that there weren't any African American families like the characters on the show.

Mrs. Morris didn't have much contact with African Americans before becoming a teacher. Although she started going to desegregated schools when she was in the ninth grade, she never really interacted with them. The only African Americans that she encountered during her youth were African American women in subservient roles. She also recalled how her family used to help her babysitter's family during the holiday. It is possible that Mrs. Morris could have preconceived ideas based on old stereotypes.

Blackmon Elementary School Participants

Mrs. Bell

Mrs. Bell grew up in the mountains of North Carolina before moving with her family to Florida. At any rate, before becoming an educator, Mrs. Bell had limited contacts with African Americans.

I was never around many African Americans so you see, I didn't experience any racial problems. I lived in North Carolina and Florida until I got married and moved with Fayetteville, North Carolina with my husband. I traveled all over the world and taught in government schools on military bases. Then I came to () Elementary School in Greensboro and got a job teaching at (), but it was different from what it is today.

Mrs. Bell didn't encounter any racial problems, because she had never taught in a predominately African American school until the recent changes at Blackmon. When she referred to () being different when she taught there, she was referring to the fact that at one time, the school was majority White. After

her stint at (), Mrs. Bell started her family and later began teaching at a private school.

I taught at () Elementary School. Then I stopped to have my family. I taught at () in 1971-1975. I stayed home for seven years, and then I went to a private school, then I came to Blackmon. Before coming back to public school, I worked with a consulting firm and I had the sweetest Black woman working for me.

When Mrs. Bell started teaching at Blackmon, the student body was composed of a majority of White children from working class families. It was during an era when the teaching profession was respected and when children were more prone to sit and listen to their teachers' lectures. It was a time when children were not inundated with computers, videos and other stimulating media. Although these differences are significant in the way that teachers should plan and implement lessons to their students, Mrs. Bell attributed the changes at Blackmon to the "change in the population of students who attend the school." The change in the population at Blackmon meant that after redistricting, more African Americans started attending the school.

Throughout the interview, Mrs. Bell demonstrated that she had little knowledge of African Americans, although she continued to insist that she had no biases. It was apparent that she had little contact with her students except for when they were in her classroom. She also seemed to assume that all of her African American students were from the same socioeconomic backgrounds.

My African American students come from single-parent households. They don't have books or magazines in their homes, and they don't have any help with their homework. I do know that sometimes a lot of the children, and I am speaking more of my experiences here at Blackmon, don't have the background knowledge.

When I asked Mrs. Bell why she thought there was an achievement gap between her African American and White students, she denied that there was a gap.

I don't think there is an achievement gap. We are getting more and more Black students. In fact, I went to a seminar in Chapel Hill, and they said that we have more Black babies being born than White babies and when you get more students, it looks like there is a gap when the truth is that there are just more of them. I don't think there is a gap.

Mrs. Bell's response to the achievement gap problem demonstrates that Mrs. Bell did not conceptualize social relations within and outside of her classroom as suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995). It might also show that she expects less of her African American students.

Mrs. Bell felt that African Americans were portrayed in a realistic way today. She further stated that the way African Americans are portrayed today had improved a lot over the years. Since Mrs. Bell seemed to have a lack of knowledge of African Americans, her students could face negative cultural stereotypes that portray members of this ethnic group (Steele, 1997; Lyons & Chesley, 2004).

Mr. Berry

Mr. Berry grew up in the exclusive area of Irving Park in Greensboro, North Carolina. Based on his evaluations, he attended the best schools as a

young child and was so impressed by his elementary teachers that he wanted to grow up and model himself after them. He also had the experience of working with youngsters in his neighborhood which made him even more interested in the profession.

I found that I liked working with kids. There were so many kids in my neighborhood, and I just enjoyed working with them. I worked in summer camp, and I did a lot of fun things with them.

Mr. Berry's experience of working with the neighborhood children was vastly different from his teaching experience because the students in his neighborhood had been all upper class White children. Mr. Berry did not have any experiences with African Americans except during his middle school years.

When I got to middle school, it was kind of scary. There were many African American kids, and they were rowdy. The teachers acted like they were afraid of them. Sometimes it was hard to learn because of all of the disturbances. It was hard for me, because I had never been around that many African Americans before.

Mr. Berry's middle school experience could have contributed to his bumpy first year as a teacher at Blackmon. His principal told me that he had really encountered struggles with classroom management techniques.

Last year, he had a hard time controlling his class. For some reason he felt that he had to yell at his African American students all of the time. I had to really work hard to help him understand that my kids didn't need that. As soon as he learned that they were children and that all they needed was lessons and activities that challenged them, he started doing much better. This year, I am just so proud of him. He has control over his

class and he seems to be having fun teaching. (Mrs. Reid, Principal, Blackmon Elementary)

Mrs. Reid realized in her interactions with Mr. Berry that his African American students may have been misbehaving because their teacher was expecting them to act inappropriately. Mr. Berry's actions in this manner could also exhibit the Pygmalion Effect or self-fulfilling prophecy. He formed the expectations; he treated his students accordingly; and their behavior conformed to his expectations. Mr. Berry's misunderstanding of African Americans was also due in part to his belief that they were depicted in a realistic manner in the media.

Mr. Berry admitted that he had learned a lot about African American students from the students in his class.

I have learned that most of my African American students are from pretty good homes. Their parents stay on them to do their homework just as my parents did me. All I have to do is call the parents, and they help me keep their children on track. I have a good relationship with my students, and I have a good relationship with their parents too.

Mrs. Blackwell

Mrs. Blackwell grew up on the coast of North Carolina. She knew at a very young age that she wanted to be a teacher. She shared that she wanted to be a teacher because she was always the person in her family who catered to working with a special needs child in her family.

I always wanted to work with special needs students because I was the one who would say, "Stop, you are doing it wrong." I majored in Education, and I never thought of doing anything else.

As a first year teacher at an all African American, urban school, Mrs. Blackwell was given the most challenging class but took pride in being able to rise to the challenge.

My first year of teaching was very hard. I taught in a very rough neighborhood. My students had a lot of street smarts, but they had a hard time learning what I wanted them to learn at school. Most of them, if not all of them, came from single parent households. Some of them had never met their fathers. The mothers struggled to make ends meet, and they really didn't understand the importance of schooling.

Mrs. Blackwell finished her first year as a star teacher. She bragged that all of her students scored well on the end of the year test, and her principal moved her to a higher grade where he felt that she could make the most positive impact. Her principal had noticed that Mrs. Blackwell's actions and words showed that she held high expectations for her students, in spite of their home lives.

Mrs. Blackwell began teaching at Blackmon when her husband's job relocated him to Greensboro, North Carolina. Although Blackmon Elementary had a large number of African American students, Mrs. Blackwell found that the students were very different from the students she had taught at her former school.

I have to admit that I expected my students to be the same as she students from my other school. When I saw that most of my students were African American and when I heard all of the negative comments from other teachers about the students at this school, I thought that I was going to have to work as hard as I did when I was in Durham. I soon found out that just because most of the students were African American didn't mean that the children came from single-parent households or that the parents didn't understand the educational system. My students come from the

same kind of families that I came from, hardworking, African American parents who wanted their children to do well.

Mrs. Blackwell admitted that she, along with some of the other teachers at Blackmon, had placed their expectations on their students based on the color of their skin. At first, Mrs. Blackwell looked at her students as an entire ethnic group instead of individuals. When Mrs. Blackwell understood that the African American students in her class at Blackmon were not the same African Americans she had taught in Durham, she raised her expectations and was very happy with her results.

When I realized that just because most of my students were African American that they were different from my intercity kids, I was able to get to know them and get wonderful results. Although I got good results from my students in Durham, I learned that I didn't have to work as hard at Blackmon. The parents here were very supportive and able to help me more than the parents in Durham. The teachers here need to understand that most of the African American students here are not as deprived as they think they are. I think that if they really got to know them like I did, they would understand this fact.

Mrs. Reid, principal at Blackmon reported that Mrs. Blackwell was the best teacher in the school, because she worked very well with her parents and students. She also was more likely to view her parents as resources rather than people that she needed to tell what to do. According to Mrs. Reid, it was not unusual to find many parents in her classroom working with small groups and serving as consultants on special projects.

Like Cortes (1995), Mrs. Blackwell felt that stereotypes in the media and popular culture could add to group understanding of African Americans. She said that even she, at times, had fallen victim to the negative influences. In addition to her beliefs that the media and popular culture could add to group understanding, Mrs. Blackwell also felt that the media could influence her students on how to behave.

Whenever I see the images of the rappers in videos, I am bothered because too many teachers think all African American boys are like that. It also bothers me because I believe that many of my young boys try to imitate what they see. At times I hear them repeat some of the stuff they hear in videos and what they get from television. The good thing about being at Mark is that the parents here don't want their children saying those things either. At my other school, the parents had too many other worries to think about.

Mrs. Blackwell was a hard working teacher who had high expectations for her students. She took the time to find the potential in all of her students, and she worked hard to include their parents in the education process.

Mrs. Blue

Mrs. Blue described herself as a late bloomer. She began her education career as an educator after she dropped out of junior college and started working at a bank. She quit her job at the bank after she had her first child. She didn't want to work the late banking hours, because she felt that she needed to be at home sooner with her daughter. She searched hard in her Brooklyn, New York, and hometown for a job that would end before four o'clock in the afternoon. She

decided to go back to school, and she got a two year associate degree in elementary education.

I didn't want to be a teacher at first. I just wanted to be in a position where I could have more time with my daughter. So I went back to school in this two-year program, and I decided to be a teacher. I quit my job at the bank where I was making much more money and decided to work as a daycare teacher.

Even though Mrs. Blue admitted that she went into the field for reasons other than making differences in children's lives, she began to like working with the children so much that she decided to go back to school for a four-year education degree.

After I met my husband and moved to North Carolina, I decided to attend a local university so that I could become a teacher. I am a late bloomer because I didn't finish school and get my teaching certificate until I was 31 years old. I had two children at the time and I really didn't know I was going to like teaching as much as I did. I didn't know that this was going to turn out like this. So, pretty much, I got into this field and now I can't think of anything else I want to do. I went into this wanting the summers off with my children and ended up liking it.

Mrs. Blue reported that she had a good relationship with her students and parents. She bragged on the fact that she received lots of parental requests to have their children placed in her room. I included Mrs. Blue in this study at the request of her principal, Mrs. Reid. Mrs. Reid said that Mrs. Blue was one of her best teachers, one she often used to serve in the leadership role while she was away from the building. It is important to note that Mrs. Blue also served as a

buddy teacher to the first year teachers at Blackmon. During the time of this study, she served as a buddy teacher to Mrs. Blackwell.

Mrs. Blue's classroom was set up in the traditional manner, with the desk in rows. One might safely assume that her classroom arrangement might have something to do with the expectations that Mrs. Blue had about her students' behavior. During a conversation, she stated how the students at Blackmon had changed since the time she had begun there and how much harder it was for her to control them.

The children here today are not like they used to be. Most of them come from single-parent families, and we just don't have the parent support that we used to have. I think the children with two parent families do better. This school was so different. I had so many more White students. I don't know when it changed. I look back in my yearbooks, and I still can't tell you when it changed.

Although Mrs. Berry is African American herself, she implied that White students are more capable of learning than her African American students or that they were the norm against which African American students are judged. Mrs. Blue's above statement could also indicate that she looked at her African American students as a group instead of individuals.

Mrs. Blue stated that she had high expectations for her students. Even though she said that she had high expectations for them, her definition of having high expectations centered around the work that she gave her students more than what she did to help her students be successful. In other words, she felt that if she gave her students a lot of homework or seat work, she had high

expectations. She did not seem to understand that her actions were just as important as her words.

Mrs. Blue felt that the images of African Americans portrayed in the media were “comical.” She was especially concerned about the influences the media and popular culture had on her students.

I think it is just comical. It is a shame of what they show. I think it is teaching our children how to act. For those children who spend all of their time watching television, they are learning how to act and they bring that behavior into the classroom. I think it is awful, and I think that is why some of the things on television are accurate.

Mrs. Blue was a teacher who took pride in the fact that she could control her students and that the parents liked her for doing so. She didn’t; however, seem to really know her students. Since she taught in the same school as Mrs. Blackwell, it would appear that she had similar students, children from working class parents who wanted the best for their youngsters.

Mrs. Bowman

Mrs. Bowman had more experience than any other teacher in this study. The 57-year-old Greensboro, North Carolina native had been teaching for 33 years. The African American educator became a teacher because of the positive role models she had as a child.

I became a teacher because when I was a child, it was an honorable profession. I had many outstanding teacher role models in elementary, high school and college; some of which are still living. In the Black community where I grew up, being a teacher was a good profession back

in my day. My upbringing had a lot to do with my parents and my teachers. I knew I wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember.

When I first met Mrs. Bowman, she appeared very frustrated or “burned out.” She told me that she had been in the profession for a long time and that she was getting tired of dealing with discipline problems. During my frequent visits to her class, she constantly complained about “today’s students,” and how hard teaching had become since she first started in the field. She also complained about how the students at Blackmon had changed.

Our students have changed. When I first started working here, we had many more White students than we have today. We also had more parent involvement. Students today are not what they used to be. I spend so much time handling discipline problems that I don’t have enough time to really teach.

Mrs. Bowman reminisced about her early experiences as a teacher. When she mentioned the fact that she had more White students when she started at Blackmon, she could have been implying that the influx of African American students had caused the school to change for the worst. It was as if she felt that the African American students were harder to teach. She also kept referring to the fact that her students who happened to be predominately African American had little parental support, which caused them to have more behavior problems. While visiting her classroom, I noticed that although she had her desks arranged in groups rather than rows, she constantly reminded the students that they had to be quiet. There was little discussion among the children and little movement. The

students were expected to sit still and work without talking or “bothering others.” Mrs. Bowman seemed to feel that keeping them quiet would keep them out of trouble. She felt that her students were incapable of talking and moving about without getting into trouble.

Although Mrs. Bowman’s classroom environment was rigid and strict, she had more multicultural pictures and posters displayed throughout her classroom than any other teacher in this study. In a “Famous Americans” center in her classroom, Mrs. Bowman had included activities on peanuts with an emphasis on George Washington Carver; Native Americans; “Holidays,” which included activities on Martin Luther King, Jr., and Kwanza; and she had the students do special projects about themselves. Each week she spotlighted one of the children and had the students share facts about their families and traditions. Mrs. Bowman seemed to be a teacher who was aware of her place in society and someone who was able to help the children conceptualize themselves and others. She took pride in her ability to work well with African American students.

I make sure that my African American students know who they are and I try to expose them to many positive role models. That is what helped me to be successful. I make sure that they know Dr. Martin Luther King, but I want them know the other leaders too. You will see in my room that even though it is not African American History month yet, I have already included famous African Americans in my lessons.

Mrs. Bowman felt that she had high expectations for her students. She made her students do their work over when it did not meet her satisfaction. She felt that only accepting only her students’ best taught them how to “reach higher.”

Personally, I don't think White teachers insist that African American students do their best. I don't accept work that is not their best. I have my students do it over until they get it right. I am proud to say that I correct my students when they say inappropriate things or use the wrong words too. I think one of the biggest reasons that we have an achievement gap is because teachers don't expect enough from our African American students.

Even though Mrs. Bowman appeared to have high expectations for her students, she appeared to feel that her role in helping the students achieve was to give them hard work or make them do assignments over. I did not see her focus on the individual needs or different learning styles of her students (Hale-Benson, 1982). Her behavior towards her class did, however, tell her students loud and clear what she expected of them.

Mrs. Bowman was not happy with the way African Americans are portrayed in the media and popular culture. She also felt that teachers could be influenced by the negative stereotypes.

I don't watch much television. I don't like rappers and I don't like their body tattoos. I don't like the way they exploit women and young girls. I don't like the way they dress with all that gold in their mouths and stuff. They make African Americans look like a big joke, and if children don't have parents who show them something different, they will start acting like those stars. Teachers, Black and White will think that African Americans are dumb by watching that stuff.

After spending several days in Mrs. Bowman's classroom, she told me that she really felt that it was time for her to do something different. She admitted that the students were beginning to "stress her out." She also admitted that the frustration she was having with the parents of her students was not their fault but

hers, because she had grown weary and tired of giving so much of herself. She also admitted that she had become frustrated with many of today's teachers.

I think some teachers, African American and White, don't have high expectations for African American students. It all goes back to the students' home life here. Many of our African American students have lots of experiences. I imagine that there are some students at this school who have been to states where I haven't been. Their parents have engaged them in different activities. We might have an African American student here who plays chess, or plays the cello, piano or who is a great ice skater. But many teachers here think that all our African American children here are poor and deprived, and they treat them this way.

Mrs. Bowman was disappointed in her colleagues at Blackmon because she felt that they had lowered their expectations for their African American students.

Mrs. Brooks

During this study, Mrs. Brooks was completing her third year as a teacher at Blackmon Elementary. She chose the teaching profession because of her close connection to her kindergarten teacher. Like Mrs. Blue, Mrs. Brooks began her post secondary education by attending a community college and receiving an associate degree before deciding that she wanted to teach in public schools.

I had the best kindergarten teacher when I went to school. This made me want to be a kindergarten teacher too. I decided that I wanted to work in a daycare center, so I went to a community college. Although I was happy there, I discovered that I really wanted to be a kindergarten teacher in the public schools. So, I went back to college and got my teaching license. I started teaching kindergarten at another school before transferring to Blackmon to teach PreK.

Mrs. Brooks grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina, in an area of town that was mostly White. She said that she did not attend school with many African Americans until she enrolled at the community college. Her limited knowledge and experiences of and with African Americans was evident in the responses she gave to many of the questions that were posed to her. For example, when I asked her about the learning styles of her African American students, she based her responses on the students' behaviors instead of their academic abilities.

I know some of them need stronger influences. I know with my students that the parents push, so I have to be a little harsh with them. When my assistant speaks to them, she speaks harder than I do, and they listen to her. They don't listen to her all of the time, but they do listen to her more than they do to me, because she gets louder with them than I do. I know I need to work on being a little tough with them.

Mrs. Brooks demonstrated that she did not understand her minority students in her classroom. She was not able to recognize and affirm their diverse cultural styles of learning, and it made her unable to communicate with them effectively. Mrs. Brooks felt that in order to work with her young students effectively, that she had to yell at them or raise her voice. She also felt that since her teacher assistant was African American, she was more capable of working with the students or keeping them calm. She did not understand that what she expected of them is what she was getting, as suggested by Merton (1948), Thomas (1928), Tauber (1997), and Field (1989). Her treatment of the students told them that she was not the lead teacher in the classroom and that they did

not have to conform to her rules or requests. They also learned from the assistant that yelling or raising their voices was acceptable in the classroom.

Mrs. Brooks' classroom was arranged so that the children could wander freely from learning station to learning station. Because of the high noise level, it wasn't always clear as to whether or not the students were actually learning the objectives that were outlined in Mrs. Brooks' lesson plan book. On my many visits in the classroom, I never saw any parents. Mrs. Brooks did state that she made many home visits, and she felt that children who had help at home did better in her classroom.

Our African American parents are out working one or two jobs, I think. I don't think they have a strong influence on their children. The outside influences are greater for my students than their parent's influences. The children in my classroom who have help at home do better. I have one little child who can read, and I know it is because her mother teaches her at home.

Mrs. Brooks' statement above showed that she had little knowledge of her students or that she could be drawing conclusions or setting expectations on stereotypes or false information about African Americans. It had been reported to me by two teachers at Blackmon that the African American students who attended the school weren't all from dysfunctional, single-parent households. She seemed to do little to affirm the minority students and get to know them as individuals.

It was not surprising to me that Mrs. Brooks felt that the way that African Americans were portrayed in the media and in popular culture was a true

depiction of African Americans. Again, I attributed this to her lack of knowledge of African Americans. During the focus group session, she was surprised at many of the statements that were made.

I really enjoyed our focus group session. It really made me aware of the negative influences that are out there. I had never thought about many of the things that we discussed before. This really made me think. It was helpful to me to hear the African American teachers speak. If they feel that they can sometimes be influenced by the negative portrayals, then I know I can be, too. I realized after that session that I have lived a pretty sheltered life.

Mrs. Brooks, like many teachers, was so concerned about the art of teaching that she really had not stopped to look at the students she was teaching and what their needs were. She also had not realized that she was viewing her African American students in a negative manner and lowering her expectations of this group of individuals. Taylor (2000) suggests that teachers can lower their expectations of African American students by viewing the students as an entire ethnic group rather than as individuals. This was evident in Mrs. Brooks' actions toward her students.

This chapter has presented the case studies of the participants in this study. The next chapter will present the analysis and interpretation of the cases through a cross case analysis of all teachers.

CHAPTER VI

CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

As stated in Chapter I, the study reported here examined in detail how teachers form expectations of African American students, focusing on whether they get to know children directly or if they form conclusions based on knowledge from popular culture stereotypes. This chapter is organized to compare the responses and teacher actions from the two schools involved in this study. I will report the patterns and differences among the participants.

Teacher expectations can play a major role in student success (Field, 1989; Merton, 1948; Owens, 1975; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tauber, 1997; Thomas, 1928). Teachers can form expectations and assign labels to students based on gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic level (Good, 1987). All of the above factors might contribute to the difference in the teacher attitudes at Mark when compared to the teachers at Blackmon. Mark Elementary was a low income, African American school. It could also be characterized as an urban, inner city school. The traditional African American students who attended Mark lived in government assisted housing or housing projects. Most of the students lived with little or no contact with a father figure. The school also had a high poverty rate with a 99% African American student population and with 95% of those students receiving free and reduced lunch

Blackmon Elementary was a school located in a rural part of town with an 89% African American student population and an 85% free and reduced lunch rate. Many of the African American students at Blackmon lived in single family housing while the others lived in modest apartments that were located near the school. Most of the African American students at Blackmon lived with both parents or both parents were actively involved in the students' lives.

Though both schools in this study had high poverty rates, Mark Elementary students appeared to have a harder time in life due to their living conditions and the absence of one parent. In spite of Mark's vast differences, the African American students at Mark outscored all elementary students in the district on the North Carolina End of Grade tests for three consecutive years. They had also met the requirements for the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates. Blackmon Elementary, on the other hand, had scores in the bottom of the quartile for the district during the 2004-2005 school year. In addition, the African American students at the school did not make Average Yearly Progress (AYP), as defined by NCLB.

Every day without knowing it, many teachers engage in prejudicial decisions that can negatively affect students (Kailin, 2002; Taylor, 2000; Rosenthal, 1973). Such was the case with some of the teachers in this study. Through interviews, observations and a focus group discussion, I was able to ascertain how the teachers felt about the African American students they taught. There was a difference in the attitudes of the teachers at Mark from the attitudes

of the teachers at Blackmon. This could account for the massive differences in the test scores between the two schools. Tables 13 and 14 show the different themes and how each teacher responded:

Table 13

Teachers with High Expectations

Teacher	School	Expectations from Popular Culture Based Information and Stereotypes	Expectations Formed from Direct Knowledge of Students
Blackwell	Blackmon	No	Yes
Bowman	Blackmon	No	Yes
May	Mark	No	Yes
Michelangelo	Mark	No	Yes
Michaels	Mark	No	Yes
Mitchell	Mark	No	Yes
Montgomery	Mark	No	Yes
Morris	Mark	No	Yes

All teachers at Mark had high expectations for their students, and they worked hard to dispel the myths about their students. In addition, they taught their students how to overcome their circumstances. Their actions demonstrated that they did not let their students' ethnicity or socioeconomic status impact their belief as to whether their students could achieve. Although the students at Blackmon came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and better housing,

many of the teachers held low expectations and made false assumptions about their abilities. They also made assumptions about their home lives.

Table 14

Teachers with Low Expectations

Teacher	School	Expectations from Popular Culture Based Information and Stereotypes	Expectations Formed from Direct Knowledge of Students
Bell	Blackmon	Yes	No
Berry	Blackmon	Yes	No
Blue	Blackmon	Yes	No
Brooks	Blackmon	Yes	No

Teachers, who can conceptualize themselves, understand who they are and their place in society and others are more prone to see students as individuals instead of their ethnic group (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teachers who understand that racism exists and know the plight of the African American student will be more conscious of meeting the African American students' needs. Many teachers in this study did not know there was a problem with racism in our society.

All of the teachers at Mark understood that there was a problem of racism in the world and that it was prevalent in the schools, although two of the teachers, Mrs. Michaels and Ms. Michelangelo were not aware of the fact that they could have their own biases. Only three teachers at Blackmon were aware

of the problems of racism. Four teachers, Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Berry, Mrs. Blue and Mrs. Brooks were not aware of the fact that they could have biases.

Table 15

Awareness of Racism and Biases in the Classroom and the Negative Impact of Stereotypes and Popular Culture Based Information

Teacher	School	Aware of Racism in the world	Aware of racism in the schools	Aware of the fact that he/she could have biases
Bell	Blackmon	No	No	No
Berry	Blackmon	No	No	No
Blackwell	Blackmon	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blue	Blackmon	Yes	Yes	No
Bowman	Blackmon	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brooks	Blackmon	No	No	No
May	Mark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michelangelo	Mark	Yes	Yes	No
Michaels	Mark	Yes	Yes	No
Mitchell	Mark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Montgomery	Mark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Morris	Mark	Yes	Yes	Yes

Many teachers have little contact with their students other than the contact they have in the classroom (Johnson, 2002). During this study, I discovered that some teachers made an effort to visit their students' homes. Getting to know students away from the school setting can help teachers get a better

understanding of the students and begin to see the students more as individuals rather than an ethnic group.

Table 16

Home Visits

Teacher	School	Home Visits (Yes or No)
Bell	Blackmon	No
Berry	Blackmon	No
Blackwell	Blackmon	Yes
Blue	Blackmon	No
Bowman	Blackmon	No
Brooks	Blackmon	No
May	Mark	Yes
Michelangelo	Mark	No
Michaels	Mark	No
Mitchell	Mark	Yes
Montgomery	Mark	Yes
Morris	Mark	Yes

More teachers at Mark than at Blackmon made home visits to their students' homes. This may have helped more teachers at Mark view their African American students as individuals than as an ethnic group.

Popular Culture and Stereotypes

All teachers interviewed for this study felt that the media has been a force in shaping school culture (Gause, 2005). There were great differences, however,

Table 17

Teachers' Responses to Questions Related to Portrayal of African Americans in the Media and Pop Culture

Teacher	School	Correct Portrayal	Incorrect Portrayal	Possible Reason for Answer
Bell	Blackmon	Yes	No	Little contact with African Americans
Berry	Blackmon	Yes	No	Little contact with African Americans before entering middle school and had bad experiences with African Americans.
Blackwell	Blackmon	Some shows are good portrayal	Most things are incorrect	African American
Blue	Blackmon	No	Yes	African American
Bowman	Blackmon	No	Believed the media help create negative stereotypes	African American
Brooks	Blackmon	Yes	no	Little contact with African Americans
May	Mark	No	Believed the media help create negative stereotypes	African American
Michelangelo	Mark	Some shows are good portrayal	Some things are incorrect	Gave answers based on her interactions with African Americans
Michaels	Mark	No	Believed the media help create negative stereotypes.	Grew up in government assisted housing and got tired of the negative stereotypes attached to her
Mitchell	Mark	No	Believed the media help create negative stereotypes	African American
Montgomery	Mark	No	Believed the media help create negative stereotypes	Grew up with African Americans living in her neighborhood
Morris	Mark	Yes	No	Little experience with African Americans

in how they responded to the question of whether or not African Americans were portrayed in a true fashion in media and in popular culture.

There are many stereotypes and negative images of African Americans in the media and in popular culture (Cortes, 1995). Most of the teachers at Mark were aware of this fact, while most of the teachers at Blackmon were not. This was consistent with the teachers who had little or limited contact with African Americans.

The teachers from Blackmon did not look at the African American students at their school who were not achieving well as a global issue. As stated by Obidah and Teel (2001), they saw nothing wrong and took no ownership in the fact that nearly all of their African American students had some of the lowest achievement scores in the district. In spite of the fact that most of the African American students came from working class families, the teachers had the feeling that the students came from poor, broken homes, and were quick to blame the families for the failure. One African American teacher, Mrs. Blackwell commented on the fact that she had made assumptions about her African American students before getting to know them:

I have to be honest. When I first came to this school, I thought that because the majority of the students were African American that they came from single parent families and that they didn't get any support. I soon realized that their parents were just like mine. They teach their children manners and they want them to behave. When I finally realized this and started treating my students accordingly, they really started doing well. I think the teachers at this school have low expectations because of the large number of African American students here. (Mrs. Blackwell, Feb., 2006)

The two schools in this study had a large percentage of African American students. Although both schools had a high concentration of African American students, the students came from very different social backgrounds. Mark's traditional students come from government assisted housing that surrounded the school. Even though many renovations and improvements had been done to perk up the outside structure of the buildings, the community still showed signs of poverty. It was not uncommon to pass many homeless people as you trekked to the school. Blackmon, on the other hand, was located in a rural community with no government assisted housing. The African American students who attended Blackmon typically lived in single family homes or apartment complexes located in working class neighborhoods. Most of the African American students who attended Mark Elementary came from single parent households, whereas the bulk of the African American students at Blackmon had two parents living in their homes. The teaching staff at Mark was made up mostly of veteran teachers who had been at Mark for more than three years. Blackmon had fewer veteran teachers and a smaller portion of teachers who had been at the school for more than three years.

The teachers at Mark expected their students to do well, and they felt responsible for helping the students be successful. Having worked with this staff for three years, I was aware of their dedication to the children and their willingness to go the extra mile in order to help their students succeed. Mrs. Mitchell, a third grade teacher summed up the feelings of most teachers at Mark,

There is not a gap here! If you look at Guilford County Schools' scores, you will find that ours are the highest and we take pride in that fact. We work hard with our kids to keep them on top. We expect our kids to do it, and that makes the difference. (Mrs. Mitchell, Feb., 2006)

Through home visits, special projects, and activities, these teachers taught the students that doing their best in school was their only way to become successful.

CHAPTER VII

DATA ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

To analyze the role of popular culture based information and stereotypes versus the direct knowledge of individuals in forming teacher expectations of African American students, I used two elementary schools with similar African American student enrollment, but with a different socioeconomic status and student achievement rates. Mark Elementary School had a 95% free and reduced lunch rate with 98% student proficiency for African Americans. Blackmon Elementary had an 85% free and reduced lunch rate with a 76% proficiency rate. Since Mark's socioeconomic status was much lower than Blackmon's, I felt that the schools would be good to examine because I wanted to be able to rule poverty out as a reason for low performance. In this study, I compared the responses from the participants at both schools in order to answer the research questions that were outlined in Chapter I.

What Expectations Do Teachers Have of Their African American Students?

How are These Expectations Formed?

Teacher expectations can play a major role in student success or student failure. What a teacher expects can determine how the teacher interacts with the students (Good, 1987; Taylor, 2000; Williams & Whitehead, 1971; Rosenthal, 1973; Pugh, 1974; Kuykendall, 2004). In the course of this study, I discovered

that teachers have different definitions for the term, “high expectations.” At Mark Elementary the phrase seemed to mean:

- that the students were capable of learning with or without their parents’ help at home;
- that teachers had to work and assume more responsibility for the African American children who did not have support at home;
- that high expectations for students meant having even higher expectations for themselves;

The teachers at Blackmon Elementary on the other hand seemed to think that having high expectations meant:

- that the children could only learn with parental help at home (They failed to see that they could have a greater influence on their students’ learning than the students’ home environments)
- providing the students with harder work to complete
- that they expected the children to complete their class work and homework
- that all the teachers had to do was expect the students to do what they assigned them to do and make them do it over if it was not correct the first time

My definition of “high expectations” involves both the teacher and the students, since expectations are expressed in the actions of the teachers as well as the teachers’ words (Clarken, 1995; Obidah & Teel, 2001). For example, if a

teacher expects a student to do well on a given assignment, the teacher must be prepared to go the extra mile in order to help the student be successful. At Mark, Mrs. Mitchell demonstrated this concept with the following statement:

Sometimes I stay here very late so that I can help my kids with their homework. I also help them work on reports and projects because they don't always have help at home. It makes me feel good to help them achieve. I have some smart kids in here. (Mrs. Mitchell, March, 2006)

More teachers at Mark gave responses that met my definition of high expectations than teachers at Blackmon. More teachers at Mark also felt that teachers could do more to help eliminate the achievement gap. They were more prone to get to know their students than the teachers at Blackmon. Mark's teachers not only viewed the parents as people who should be told what to do, but they also looked to them as resources for their classroom.

I invite the parents to come in and I show them how they can help us. I have found that sometimes they don't know how to help their children at home. So, I train them to help us, and then they learn how to do it at home with their children. They are valuable resource, because they teach me things that I didn't know about their children. (Mrs. May, Mark Elementary)

Most of the teachers at Blackmon never mentioned learning about their students from their parents. They relied on assessments to determine what their students could do, and many of them misjudged their students based on what they thought they knew about their home lives. The teachers, however, did not seem to be aware of their misjudgments. Based on many of their comments, they felt that they were helping their students or that they had a clear understanding of

what they perceived to be the problems. A few of them changed their minds about their students when they realized they had made an error in their judgment.

I found out for the most part that the African American students here have pretty good home lives. I think most of their parents care about them and want them to do a good job. I don't have many children who don't bring their homework in. (Mr. Berry, Blackmon Elementary)

How are These Expectations Associated with what the Teachers Feel They Know about the Students from Direct Knowledge of Particular Types of Students, Especially from Stereotypes and Other Messages in Popular Culture?

Popular Culture

Popular culture is difficult to define (Cusic, 2001; Williams, 1998). For the purposes of this study, I define popular culture as the “meanings we construct from images, languages, and formats of our day-to-day lives, the everyday forms of communications, art, and language that represent the people” (Gause, 2001, p. 31). Good and well intentioned teachers may practice racism and rely on negative stereotypes without being aware of it (Cross, 1996; Kailin, 2002; Taylor, 2000). Teachers can become so busy with the daily operation of school that they might lose focus on individual students. Teachers often feel the pressures of high stakes testing and state and federal mandates. This may cause some teachers to avoid engaging students in what they see as unmeaning activities.

We don't have time to teach many cultural relevant activities. With the No Child Left Behind, we can't do anything because we just have to keep teaching so that we can get those high test scores. (Mrs. Blue, Blackmon Elementary)

Mark's teachers were more willing to say that they were capable of having biases than Blackmon's teachers. This was evident during the focus group discussions. At Blackmon, when shown pictures of three African American young men, Mrs. Bell, Mr. Berry, Mrs. Bowman and Mrs. Brooks said that all of the students would be able to do well, no matter how they looked or dressed, until Mrs. Blackwell and Mrs. Blue joined the meeting and made the following comments:

That student wearing the baggy pants dropped down to his waist will have a harder time in school because teachers will think he is a thug and they won't really know how smart he is. The student dressed in the khaki pants and dress shirt will be more accepted because he is dressed more conservatively and the teachers might think he is smarter. It's sad because the other two students are probably smarter. (Mrs. Blackwell, Feb., 2006)

Sometimes I have to stop and ask myself if I had the wrong impression of some students because of the way they are dressed. It is funny; the young men, who are dressed in the baggy pants with all of the bling, are probably the smartest. But that is not how the world sees it, and unfortunately, it is not how teachers see it either. (Mrs. Blue, Feb., 2006)

After Mrs. Blackwell and Mrs. Blue made the above statements, the other teachers were more willing to admit that they too could have biases.

You are right; the student dressed in the more conservative clothes would probably have an easier time in school. He looks like he will also have fewer discipline problems. (Mrs. Brooks, Feb., 2006)

During the focus group discussion at Mark, the teachers quickly responded that although they tried hard not to, they at times found themselves judging students by the way they looked.

Sometimes I see young men dressed like that, and I get scared. Then I just have to stop and remind myself that that young man could be my son and I don't want people scared of my son because of the way he might look. (Mrs. May, Feb., 2006)

The teachers in this study agreed that the media could sometimes add to group misunderstandings through the presentation of negative stereotypes and overemphasis on negative themes (Cortes, 1995). Mrs. May was bothered by what she described as African Americans being shown as a "joke." She felt that the negative images hurt her students, as they served as negative role models. Mrs. Michelangelo believed that the negative images "hindered her students." She also felt that the media and popular culture stereotypes hurt all people in our society.

I worry about what kids are watching and listening to today. I think young people are growing up too fast. The media hinders regardless of race, creed or gender, because today there is a lot more television than there used to be, and it sends out too many negative messages. (Ms. Michelangelo, Jan., 2006)

Mrs. Michaels felt that the media and popular culture images could be divided into two extremes. One she stated was the image of the African American thug, and the other is what she referred to as the "Cosby Show" image. Her definition of the Cosby Show image was that the media shows some African

Americans making it in the “White World,” but it fails to show the struggle that some African Americans have to overcome in order to get to that level. She used the example of her own son.

I have a son, and although we are now middle class and our lives could somewhat be similar to that of the Crosby's, I have to struggle to keep my children out of the streets, and my children, although they are middle class continue to work harder than the average White students just to prove themselves. So I think the media goes from one extreme to the other.
(Mrs. Michaels, Feb., 2006)

Mrs. Mitchell defined the influence of the media and popular culture as “the African American’s enemy.” She further stated that African Americans were “their own worst enemy” in that they added to the negative images through the gangsta rap music industry.

The remaining teachers at Mark, Mrs. Montgomery and Mrs. Morris, felt that the negative images of African Americans portrayed in the media and popular culture were unrealistic, and that it hurt the education system. Mrs. Montgomery said that she “wished the media could help educators instead of hindering them.”

Most teachers at Blackmon, like all of the teachers Mark, felt that images of African Americans portrayed by the media were negative and incorrect. Two teachers at Blackmon, Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Brooks, felt that the media and popular culture portrayal of African Americans were accurate. This could have been attributed to the fact that both teachers had very limited contacts with African Americans beyond their classrooms.

It was evident throughout this study that when the participants got to know their students, they were able to dismiss preconceived notions or stereotypes. They were also more able to view their students as individuals rather than an entire ethnic group. Although the teachers at Mark were just as busy as the teachers at Blackmon, they referred to their students less as an ethnic group and more as individuals. The teachers at Blackmon did quite the opposite. Mark's teachers were more aware of themselves and their place in society. Teachers like those at Mark are more prone to see their students as individuals.

When the teachers at Blackmon answered questions, they often made statements about "these" or "those" students. It was apparent that they really didn't know many of their pupils. The principal summed it up as follows:

Too many people think that our students come from bad home lives and they don't. Most of my African American children come from working class families. Good families with dreams and goals for their children. It really hurts me when people think that we have "bad children." Our children are not bad. Some people think that when our population changed many years ago that we lost our "good" White children. (Mrs. Reid, Feb., 2006)

At Mark, the teachers were quite the opposite. The assistant principal stated:

The teachers here work themselves to death. They take so much pride in the fact that our children are the highest achievers in the district. Although the children live in poverty, the teachers work hard to give them all the help they need. (Mr. Daniels, Jan., 2006)

It was evident during the study that the teachers at Mark were more prone to view their students as individuals, rather than to be influenced by popular culture stereotypes and negative messages from the media.

Teacher Expectations

One teacher at Mark, Ms. Michelangelo, was a first year teacher. On my frequent visits to the school, I noticed how the veteran teachers coached and helped her with her lesson plans and lesson delivery. The teachers seemed to have high expectations for the students, themselves and their colleagues. They assigned their students activities with specific task outcomes and gave clear explanations on what the students had to do to accomplish the tasks competently (Garcia & Asención, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The teachers at Blackmon were more prone to give their students assignments by handing them worksheets and then going over the directions. On one visit, I was invited to come and watch a classroom of students participate in a writing lesson. The teacher stated that she was proud of her smart children, and she wanted me to see what great writers they were. I was told that the students were supposed to copy over their corrected narrative drafts for the final writing. As I walked around the classroom, I noticed that all of the White students and many of the African American students had markings on their papers that had been made by the teacher. These were the corrections that had taken place during the conferencing phase of the writing process. As I walked over toward a young African American girl who was sitting at her desk beaming by the

comment that the teacher had made to me, I noticed that there were no markings on her draft. She looked up at me and smiled as she copied her title with misspelled words on the clean sheet of “paper for publishing.” I stopped her before she copied the word, “like,” wrong and asked her to read her title to me. When I saw that she could read it without any hesitation, I pointed to the misspelled word and asked her to look at it again. Immediately, she said, “Oh,” and corrected her mistake. Although I had originally come to the school to meet with Mrs. Reid, I spent the rest of my visit in that classroom conferencing with my new little friend. As I got ready to leave the classroom, the teacher came over and told me that the little girl was slow and that she had made so much progress. She also told me that the girl was learning disabled. Although it was difficult for me, I refrained from making a comment about what I had observed. I wanted her to know that all the student seemed to need was a little more of her attention. Instead, I smiled and said that the student was a good reader and a good speller because she was able to correct almost all of her mistakes. The teachers at Blackmon were not bad teachers or bad people; they were just unconscious of their biases. They were also overworked, as all the teachers were in this study, which may have caused them to be blind to many issues beyond the high stakes testing. The teacher described above felt that she had high expectations, as she had bragged on several occasions to me on how well her students worked. Her actions, however, showed me that she really did not understand the meaning of the term.

The veteran teachers at Mark had a lot to do with how the expectations were formed for the children they served.

I have been her for a long time. I remember when our scores weren't good. Then we started working together and making lots of progress. I tell these new teachers that if they want to be successful here that they have to get to know these kids and their families. We are so lucky that we can walk to our kids' homes. We have also had some great principals in the past that made sure that we kept doing what we needed to be doing. (Mrs. Mitchell, Jan., 2006)

All of the teachers at Mark, however, did not follow Mrs. Mitchell's advice.

Some of these teachers don't listen and they have a hard time here. They say that they don't want to make home visits because they are scared. I tell them that they had better. That is the only way they can get to know their kids and their families and the only way the families get to know them. (Mrs. Mitchell, Feb., 2006)

I need to point out that the African American children who attended Blackmon did not live close to their school. The African American traditional students at Mark walked to school each day, while some of the African American students at Blackmon were bused to the school from as far as a 10 mile radius. Out of the six teachers who were interviewed from Blackmon, only one stated that she did home visits, although she added that it was a requirement of the pre-kindergarten program. Comparing the number of home visits made by the teachers at Mark to the number of home visits made at Blackmon was further evidence that home visits can not only play an important role in helping teachers get to know their students, but can help with student achievement as well.

During observations at both schools, it was noted that students at Mark Elementary were called on more for academic reasons than for discipline reasons. The teachers at Mark also gave the students more assistance.

Table 18

Number of Students Called on for Academic Responses and Discipline Reasons at Blackmon and Mark Elementary Schools

School	# Students called on for academic responses	# Students called on for discipline reasons
Blackmon	9	18
Mark	18	7

Five out of six teachers at Mark had their desks arranged for collaboration and group work, while three out of six teachers at Blackmon had their desks arranged for collaboration and group work. This could indicate that more teachers at Mark believe that African American children can work well in groups. However, since this was a limited case study with only six teachers from each school, more research will be needed in this area in order to draw clear conclusions.

What is the Relative Impact of Pop Culture and Stereotypes, Versus Direct Knowledge on Teachers' Actions and Interactions with Students?

Previous research suggests that stereotypical images of African Americans are embedded in our schools that show African Americans as being inferior (Cross, 1996; Kailin, 2002; Lynch, 1987; Meier, 2002). Teachers may

evaluate children relative to their stereotypes of particular groups (Williams & Whitehead, 1971). All teachers in this study admitted that either they or some of their colleagues had misjudged students by the way they looked during the focus group discussion sessions. After looking at the picture of the African American male dressed in hip hop fashion, Mrs. May, an African American teacher at Mark stated;

I am embarrassed to admit that sometimes I have to catch myself and make myself stop looking at my little boys with the dreadlocks different. The young man in that picture could be my son. You see, even I am influenced by all of those gangster rappers. (Mrs. May, Feb., 2006)

Mark Elementary Traditional Program had predominantly low income African American children. Studies have shown that teachers at these schools tend to lower their expectations for their students (Diamond et al., 2004; Taylor, 2000). The teachers at Mark were aware of the stereotype threat that their students could face (Steele, 2003). In spite of the students' home lives and other problems that they might face, the teachers at Mark worked hard to help them "overcome" their obstacles.

Though most of the students at Blackmon came from working class families, several participants of this study were educating them on the perceptions of who they thought they were (Brophy & Good, 1974). As stated by Mrs. Blackwell, they made assumptions that the students must be from single-parent families, and they also thought that because of the color of their skin, their population of students had changed. They were also not aware of their own

negative reactions toward the children. This was evident in two different responses from teachers at Blackmon about the social backgrounds of their students. Mrs. Brooks said;

I think they know a lot of street smarts. They know how to interact with their friends; you know, they are cool. They interact with their friends but their parents don't influence them. They have a lot of outside influences.

Mrs. Blackwell's answer to the same questions was drastically different;

I came here from a school that was 99% African American, so I thought that the parents here would be like the parents I worked with there. But- all of my students aren't like the inner city students I was used to working with. I have lots of children who come from fine families-parents who want their children to always do their best. They are taught to be well behaved, and all of them aren't street smart like the children I used to work with.

All of Mrs. Blackwell's responses showed that she worked diligently to get to know her students. She was also aware of her own negative reactions toward given students.

Mrs. Brooks and Mrs. Bell were not aware of their racial and cultural insensitivity that probably affected the teaching and learning of their students (Kailin, 2002). They were good teachers who on many occasions performed poorly. Both teachers seemed to lower their expectations for many of their African American youngsters. Mrs. Brooks said that her African American students listened and followed the directions of her teaching assistant more than they did her because the teacher assistant was African American. During an observation in Mrs. Bell's classroom, I observed her giving the students that she

felt were capable more of her attention while she let the students that she felt were slow learners work independently on busy work.

During the focus group discussions at Blackmon, Mrs. Blackmon was late joining the group. After waiting about 15 minutes for her and being considerate of the teacher's time, I read the norms for the group session and proceeded with the activity. When I showed the first group of pictures, and asked them which student in the group would have a harder time achieving in school, no one appeared to want to talk. Finally, Mrs. Bell spoke up and stated that she felt that all of the students could achieve. Before the discussion moved to the next person, Mrs. Blackwell walked in and got caught up on the discussion. Before giving it a second thought, she pointed to the young man dressed in the hip hop clothing.

Although I bet he is as smart as the other two, he will have the hardest time learning because he looks like a thug. I should say that teachers might look at him and think that he is a thug. Some teachers might even be afraid of him because of the way he looks. (Mrs. Blackwell, Feb., 2006)

Mrs. Brooks then stated;

I am so glad to hear you say that, I wanted to say it but I didn't know how everyone would feel. You are right, he is probably just as smart, but you can't see it because of the way he is dressed.

The teachers at Blackmon told me that they could only meet for an hour on that day because the focus group session was scheduled on the same day as their regularly scheduled staff meeting. Our plans were to meet with me for an

hour, and then they could attend their staff meeting for an hour. After Mrs. Blackwell ended the silence, the teachers engaged in a lively discussion about racism and stereotypes for two hours. Mrs. Bell in particular seemed to enjoy the session. When she made a statement about the achievement gap not existing, her colleagues gently illustrated that there was one.

The focus group discussion at Mark was unlike the session at Blackmon. The teachers had already assembled when I arrived and I had to constantly review our norms as everyone started sharing personal accounts of racism and stereotypes (see Appendix). All teachers admitted that popular culture based information and stereotypes could affect a teacher's actions with students if the teachers did not look past those influences and get to know their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

There were clear differences between the impact of popular culture on the teacher actions of the teachers from Blackmon and the actions of the teachers from Mark Elementary. Table 19 illustrates the number of teachers at each school who held their views of their students from popular schools versus getting to know their students directly.

Cross (1996) suggests that stereotypical images of African Americans are embedded in our schools. The chart above shows that out of twelve teachers, four teachers from Blackmon Elementary held views from popular culture about their students in forming expectations of their abilities. Two of the participants,

one from Blackmon and one from Mark, were sometimes influenced by the images and worked hard to overcome their judgments.

Table 19

Number of Teachers at Each School who Held Their Views of Their Students from Popular Culture Versus Getting to Know Their Students Directly

	Held Views from Popular Culture, Did Not Know Students Personally	At Times Could be Influenced by Popular Culture and Worked Hard to Overcome	Did Not Rely on Popular Culture, Did Know Students Personally
High Expectations of Students		Morris Berry	May Michaels Mitchell Montgomery Michelangelo Blackwell
Low Expectations of Students	Brooks Bowman Blue Bell		

Although a larger percentage of Mark's African American students were from low-income families, the teachers at Mark held higher expectations for their students, and they did not rely on popular culture information to form their expectations. This finding did not correlate with most of the literature in that many scholars suggest that in predominantly low-income African American schools, teachers tend to have lower expectations for their students (Diamond et al.,

2004; Taylor, 2000). Mark's teachers spent more time getting to know their students, which could be attributed to their high expectations and the overall achievement rate of the students at Mark compared to Blackmon.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Improving the American educational system for African American students is a huge challenge. Since slavery to the present day, the focus on African American students has been to teach them to read and write (hooks, 2003b). Since slavery, the stigma of inferiority of African Americans has thrived in our culture (Collins, 2004a). Unfortunately, racism is alive in our schools, and it has been for a long time (Chesley, 2005). In the course of trying to solve this problem, many educational leaders have forced teachers to attend multicultural workshops and engage them in “racism elimination” sessions. Although such activities are needed, rarely do educational leaders seek other viable solutions by looking to the teachers themselves as resources (Delpit, 1995). This study was designed to learn from the teachers directly in order to share their knowledge and insight with others.

The twelve teachers who participated in this study were all considered to be good teachers by their principals. They arrived at school each day early and they often stayed long after the principals had gone home for the evening. Even though they were good teachers, at the completion of the study, they admitted that they had biases and that it was important for them to get to know their children on an individual basis.

The teachers at Mark appeared to know their students better than the teachers at Blackmon knew theirs. Mark's participants were more aware of their children's home lives, and they viewed their students as individuals. Their greater knowledge may have had something to do with the following contributing factors:

- Mark's traditional students lived in the neighborhood surrounding the school, and the teachers could walk to their residences for home visits.
- Historically, Mark Elementary always had a large number of African American students, and therefore, the teachers were accustomed to working with them. Teaching the low income African American students could have been a way of life for the teachers (Obidah & Teel, 2001).
- Historically, Mark had very strong principals who were good instructional leaders. According to the school treasurer, Mrs. Joy, who had worked at Mark for 30 years and who had grown up in a nearby neighborhood, Mark's leaders were always people who did more than was required of them. According to Mrs. Joy, all of the principals that she had worked with not only learned all of the students' names, but they also had become acquainted with the families. In addition, the principals held the teachers accountable for meeting the needs of all students.

Most of the teachers at Blackmon did not know their African American students well. They often referred to them as an ethnic group. This may have been due to the following contributing factors:

- Blackmon's African American students were bused to the school from as far as a 10 mile radius.
- Historically, Blackmon was an all White school and gradually increased its African American student enrollment. Many teachers on staff were teaching the African American students based on what they thought they knew about them.
- Up until the arrival of Mrs. Reid, Blackmon had not had a principal who was a strong instructional leader. According to a teacher who had been on the staff for a long period of time, most of the principals had been good principals, they were good disciplinarians, but they were not strong instructional leaders.

One teacher at Blackmon, Mrs. Blackwell, was different from the rest of the Blackmon participants. In spite of the fact that she could not walk to her students' homes, she ran her classroom just as the teachers at Mark ran theirs. She did not make home visits, but she had gotten to know her parents;

I invite them in as often as I can. We plan special programs for them and I keep them informed. I help them and they help me. They are very supportive. I also try to call them for the good things so that they won't only hear from me when there is a problem.

Mrs. Blackwell's willingness to get to know her parents without visiting their homes could suggest that teachers can find ways to connect to parents without home visits. She was the only teacher at Blackmon who acknowledged the fact that all of her African American students did not come from the same backgrounds.

Although the race of the teachers did not influence the results of this study in a significant manner, Mrs. Mitchell, an African American teacher at Mark, and Mrs. Bowman, an African American teacher at Blackmon, seemed to think that only White teachers had biases. They might have felt this way based on their own personal experiences. They could also have been basing this belief on the feeling that African American teachers couldn't possibly have biases against their own race. Before this study, I shared the same feeling or thought. Throughout the study, however, I learned that the African American teachers at Blackmon shared many of the same feelings as the White teachers. Mrs. Mitchell's comment included the fact that some White teachers tried to "act Black."

My students sometimes make a mistake and call me Mama. I bet they don't accidentally call a White teacher Mama. We had this White teacher one year who tried his best to get his students to like him. He even tried to act Black by using slang and stuff. I stopped him and told him that he needed to stop that and be the teacher. He didn't last here long. (Mrs. Mitchell, Mark Elementary)

Mrs. Bowman shared with me that she had taught at a school where there were a limited number of African American students at one point in her career. She had also been one of two African American staff members. It was during this time that

she formed many opinions about White teachers and their relationship with African American students.

I think many White teachers don't think our children can learn because they believe everything they see on television. They just don't expect anything from our children. (Mrs. Bowman, Blackmon Elementary)

While Mrs. Bowman was quick to criticize the White teachers and in spite of the fact that she always made statements about having high expectations, she felt that her job was only to expect things from her students and that it was their parents' job to help make the children ready for what she wanted to teach them. In fact, this was the feeling of most of the teachers at Blackmon, African American and White. The teachers at Blackmon quickly blamed the parents for student failure. Mrs. Michael, an African American teacher at Mark also blamed the parents and made assumptions about her African American students.

All teachers could give me a definition for culturally relevant instruction and tell me that it was a part of their practice. In spite of their feelings about this term, I saw very little evidence in the classrooms or in the teachers' actions at Blackmon Elementary. Mark's teachers did not have many famous African Americans on their walls, but they did seem to understand the cultural beliefs, values, norms and traditions of their students (Boykin, 1994; Meier, 2002). This helped them affirm the students, which in turn, positively impacted their teaching and communication with their students and families.

The literature suggests that racism exists in our schools, whether overt or subtle (Cross, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Good, 1987; Kuykendall, 2004; Perry et al., 2003; Taylor, 2000; Williams & Whitehead, 1971). African American students do better in schools where teachers get to know them and provide instruction accordingly. The teachers at Mark got to know their students as individuals and worked hard to help them succeed. The teachers at Blackmon, except for Mrs. Blackwell, operated on what they thought they knew about the students. In fact, Mrs. Bell claimed not to see color in her students and ignored discriminatory practices of students of color such as the achievement gap (Schofield, 1986). The teachers at Mark appeared to be more culturally competent. They demonstrated knowledge of the history of minority populations, societal racism and the role of community and family (Boykin, 1994; Kailin, 2002; Sullivan, 1979).

The role of popular culture based information and stereotypes can influence educators in negative ways as they work with African American students (Delpit, 1995; Ferguson, 2001; hooks, 2003a; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lapchick, 2000; Meier, 2002; Steele, 2003; Taylor, 1999). Getting to know the students as individuals rather than an ethnic group can help teachers have higher expectations, which will help African American students achieve at higher rates (Adams & Cohen, 1974; Brophy & Good, 1974; Goldenberg, 1992; Ladson-Billings & King, 1990; Mitchell, 1990; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

The teachers in this study who understood that popular culture based information and stereotypes could influence their expectations and actions

towards their students worked harder to make sure that they got to know their children as individuals. This was especially true at Mark Elementary. Not only did they work hard to overcome the stereotypes, but they also taught their students to look beyond them.

I try to help my students make it in this world. I tell them that I don't care where they come from, what color they are or where they live, that they are smart and that they can make something out of their lives. I don't let them walk in here acting like little pimps. When they try to come in here acting cool, I stop them. (Mrs. Mitchell, March, 2006)

On the other hand, many of the teachers at Blackmon were hesitant in admitting that they had biases or that they relied on popular culture based information.

Based on some of their responses during the focus group session and interviews, it is likely that they do form some of their expectations based on popular culture based information.

Lesson Learned/Strategies That Can Help Teachers Get to Know Their African American Students

When I was a principal, I used to ask all teacher candidates why they wanted to become teachers. Most of them would reply that they “believed all children could learn.” When I would ask them a question about student treatment, they would respond that all children are equal, and that they all deserved the best that teachers could give them. It didn't take me long as a teacher to discover that many times educational jargon is easier to quote than practice. This study revealed that in spite of all of the educational buzz words, African American

students still face the possibility of being misjudged by their teachers. It also showed that teachers can lower their expectations based on their lack of knowledge about given students. This study showed that both African American and White teachers have biases. Furthermore, it showed that the students whose teachers got to know them, including outside the classroom setting, achieved greater academic success. The teachers in the study with limited knowledge of African Americans were more prone to believe the negative stereotypes and other messages from the media and popular culture. I must point out that the White teachers at Mark Elementary were successful in meeting the needs of their African American students. A conclusion could be drawn that since these teachers worked in a setting that fostered high expectations for all, they became a part of the culture of the school. Traditionally, Mark Elementary had strong principals, who planted seeds of antiracism and who held the teachers accountable to teach all of the students. On my visits to Mark during this study, several teachers expressed a concern about their colleagues. Mrs. Mitchell was especially worried, she said, "Please help Mark. I am so concerned that the new teachers aren't getting the help they need."

The principal at Blackmon was a very strong leader. According to her curriculum facilitator, she was really making positive changes for the students. She reported;

Our school is moving forward. Mrs. Reid had a tough job. Many of these teachers were not accountable for the progress of all students before. It is

going to take a while, but we are going to get there. The whole climate of the school is changing.

The principal is the key to making sure that African American students are respected, valued and held in high esteem by all adults in the school. The principals must foster a learning community that values wholeness over division (hooks, 2003a). Today's principals must ensure the following in order to successfully meet the needs of African American students. This study showed that it is important for teachers to form relationships with their students, and popular culture stereotypes can confuse or mislead teachers. Today's principals must ensure the following in order to successfully meet the needs of African American students.

1. Set clear goals and high expectations for all students.
 - a. Teach teachers the definition of high expectations. Help them to understand that having high expectations for students requires extra work on their part. The teachers at Mark felt that having high expectations for their students meant having high expectations for themselves. This caused them to tutor their children after school whenever they felt that their students needed extra help, make home visits and follow up with their students when they moved on to the next grades.
 - b. Establish a "no tolerance policy" on racism, stereotypes. Insist that the teachers learn about the different ethnic groups in the school

and honor them, but that they also will view the members of the different groups as individuals.

2. Provide staff development activities for teachers that will help them examine their own biases as well as learn about the rich history of African Americans.
 - a. Hold focus group discussions on racism, stereotypes and popular culture-based information and teacher expectations (see questions in appendix). The teachers in this study felt that these activities were helpful in their practice.

I liked hearing teachers talk about the problems of racism and stereotypes. We don't get a chance to talk to each other on these topics. We go to those workshops and listen to other people tell us how we feel, but we don't get to really talk about how we feel. (Mrs. Blue, March, 2006)

- b. Revisit the issues listed above at least quarterly.
 - c. Have book studies during staff meetings and assign biographies on famous African Americans and their contributions to America.

Include people such as Madame C. J. Walker, an African American millionaire in the early 1900s, and Dr. Ben Carson, outstanding brain surgeon. Encourage the teachers to share what they learn with their students.
3. Work with school leadership teams to align African American history into the regular curriculum.

4. Monitor how effective the teachers are in meeting the academic needs of the African American children.
 - a. Keep a close count on how many African American children are removed from the classrooms for discipline reasons.
 - b. Read the progress reports of African American students before they are sent home and conference with the teachers if the majority of the low grades and/or negative comments were given to African American students.
 - c. Review report cards, and do the same as above. Ask teachers how you can assist them in helping the struggling students. This will help them understand that you want all students to be successful.
5. Monitor the work that is displayed on the walls in the classrooms. Insist that students are pushed to do their best, and make sure that teachers are only accepting the students' best, as well as providing assistance so that the work can be of quality.
6. Invite parents to staff meetings as guest speakers.
 - a. Find out some talents that African American parents might have. Invite them to staff meetings to share their gifts. This will help the teachers see them as resources and validate their importance.
 - b. Train parents to become tutors. They do not have to know how to teach in order to listen to children read.
7. Go beyond the bus ride in the neighborhood.

- a. Refrain from taking your staff on a bus ride through the “underprivileged neighborhood.” Although it is good for teachers to know where their students come from, some teachers who have negative feelings about low income African Americans might be even more prone to look at the students as a group instead of individuals on the bus tour. Instead, encourage staff to get to know their students. At staff meetings, have teachers share highlights of their students.
- 8. Monitor what students teachers select as leaders for their classrooms during class meetings, class plays and for other school activities.
 - a. Recommend that teachers select leaders in the class who represent the demographics of that class. For example, if a class of 25 has 10 White students and 15 African Americans, there should be both African American and White leaders.
- 9. Keep communication open with teachers about racism.
 - a. Learn with the teachers. A good leader is one who learns with the people she leads.
 - b. Share articles about racism with the staff, and invite them to share as well.
 - c. Help teachers to feel that is okay to make mistakes as long as the mistakes are corrected.

- d. Be the role model for the teachers, so that they can be role models for their students. "More is caught than taught."

10. Celebrate!

- a. Plan celebrations for the staff to celebrate their successes of being able to work with all children. One teacher at Mark told me that the previous principal used to celebrate and praise them all of the time. This will make the teachers take more pride and value in their work.

Conclusion

For the duration of this study at Mark Elementary, I learned that high expectations for African American students can make a difference to their success in school. In addition, I learned that getting to know African American students as individuals, rather than perceiving them as a negative ethnic group can help teachers establish high expectations.

At Blackmon, I learned that when teachers hold low expectations for African American students, the students perform accordingly. I also learned that teachers can have biases of which they may not be aware.

At both schools, particularly at Blackmon, I learned that teachers can be influenced by negative messages and stereotypes from popular culture based information. Furthermore, I learned that having an awareness of the fact that one can be swayed makes it easier for teachers to dismiss the negative messages and see the students for who they are.

This study showed that teachers are not given a forum often enough to discuss true feelings about racism. Few research studies have examined how teachers conceptualize race (their own and of their students) and how their views about race may influence their classroom practice (Johnson, 2002; Kailin, 2002). Further study on this topic is needed. Moreover, it would be interesting to determine the influence of the school leaders in establishing culturally sensitive environments for students.

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APPENDIX

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Interview Questions

I began my interviews with the following in order to help the session flow:

Tell me a little bit about yourself? Where did you grow up? Why did you become a teacher? What do you like about the work?

Let's talk a little bit about the students in your class. When the school year begins, how do you get to know them, their learning styles? Do you talk to their previous teachers at all? Is it important to understand their social backgrounds? If so, how do you gather information about that?

Tell me about a child that you know really well. . .

Now let's talk about a student who you don't feel you know at all. . .

And is there a student who falls somewhere in between?

I am especially interested in understanding how teachers work with their African American students. As you know, there is a persistent gap between the achievement of many African American students and their white peers. So let's talk about your African American students for a minute. . .

As you know, race is a hot button issue in our society, and we're still struggling to become truly multicultural. So now I'd like to ask you some questions about your own experiences and thoughts regarding different racial and cultural groups. Please try to be as honest as possible. Clearly, I am African American myself, but I don't want that to stop you from saying anything that's on your mind. I won't judge anything you say.

I conducted qualitative semi structured interviews by asking the following probes as necessary to ensure that the themes I am studying will be covered in the interviews.

Pop Culture Based Information and Stereotypes

1. What can you tell me about the African American students' social background?
2. What role does your African American students' social background play in their learning? How do you know this or what informs your thinking about this?
3. What experience other than in your work environment have you had with African Americans? How do you know this or what informs your thinking about this?
4. How many African American students do you think will score 4s on the EOG?
5. Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students?

6. How do you think African Americans are portrayed on television and popular culture or in the media? Have you found these portrayals accurate based on your knowledge of your students? How so, how not?
7. What do you know about the learning styles of African American students?

Expectations

1. How many African American students do you think will score 4s on the EOG?
2. Is it unusual for your African American students to be the top students in a classroom? Why or Why not?
3. Have you ever had an African American student achieve at a higher rate than you expected? If so, what do you think caused this to happen?
4. What conditions causes your African American students to achieve at high rates?
5. How do you determine what your students can and cannot do?

Direct Knowledge of Individuals

1. How do you get to know your African American students?
2. How do you involve the parents of your African American students in your classroom?
3. What is your definition of culturally relevant instruction? How is this a part of your practice, if at all? Why or why not?
4. How do you know what your African American students can achieve?

5. Pick the child in your class that you know best. Can you tell me about this child's social background and life outside school (family, hobbies interests, etc.)?

Data Theme	Relevant Interview Questions	
	<i>First Interview</i>	<i>Second Interview</i>
Direct Knowledge of Students	PC1, PC3, DK1, PC7	DK2, DK5, PC5
Familiarity with pop culture/Stereotypes	PC2, PC5, PC6, PC3, DK3	DK 4, PC5
Low Expectations of African American Students	PC4, PC7, E2, E3	E1, E5
High Expectations of African American Students	PC4, E2, E4	E1, E5

PC= Popular Culture Questions; E=Expectations Questions; DK= Direct Knowledge

Observation Data

The observations will not tell me about the teacher knowledge but rather indicate if the teachers' high or low expectations affect their relationship with their students. I used the following observation form during observation visits:

Observation Form

Student	Race	Called on by Teacher During Observation for Academic Response (Yes or No)	Called on by Teacher During Observation for Discipline Reason (Yes or No)	Quantity and Quality of Teacher/ Student Interaction	Quality Work Displayed (Yes or No)

Pictures of African Americans are displayed in the classroom in roles other than sports figures or entertainers Yes_____ No_____

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

I started the focus group session by stating the following norms:

Today I am going to show you some pictures of African American students. I am going to ask you some questions about these pictures. Before we start, I have developed the following norms for this session:

- **Everyone will have the opportunity to speak one at a time.**
- **No answer is right or wrong**
- **No one HAS to answer a certain question**
- **You will not be requested to attend further events related to this research**
- **Please speak one at a time so comments will not be misinterpreted.**

I used pictures of African American people (see attached copies) to lead discussions with the teachers. The pictures included:

- **3 African American young ladies**
- **3 African American young men**
- **2 African American families**

I had a focus group with each set of teachers at their schools. I asked the following questions:

- 1. Look at the three young ladies, which of them do you think would have a harder time achieving in school? Why?** *(One of the young ladies is dressed in hip hop clothes, one is dressed in more conservative clothing with her hair straight and one is dressed in conservative clothing with an Afro).*
- 2. Look at the three young men. Which of them do you think would have a harder time achieving in school? Why?** *(same as above)*
- 3. In this group of students, who do you think would be most likely to attend college? Why?** *(This question will be asked using the pictures above).*
- 4. Here are two African American families. Which of these children do you think would have an easier time in school? Why?** *(The family pictures show one African American student with a father and a mother*

conservatively dresses. The second picture shows a student with one parent dressed in hip hop clothing).

5. Do you feel that this school is a good school for the average African American student? Why or Why not?

The discussions during the focus group helped me determine if the teachers have opinions of African Americans based on pop culture based information and stereotypes.